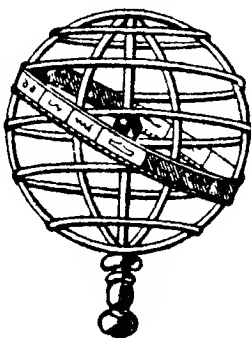


PAUL WYNTER'S SACRIFICE.



BY MRS DUFFUS HARDY

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BY

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AUTHOR OF

“A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE,”

“A HERO'S WORK,”

“DAISY NICHOLL,”

“LIZZIE,”

ETC.

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PAUL WYNTER'S SACRIFICE

CHAPTER I.

A C A T A S T R O P H E.

"What Fate imposes man must needs abide ;
It boots not to resist both wind and tide."



YEAR ago!—looking back it seems nothing—a mere speck in this world's life! but looking forward, it seems an interminable space, a prolonged chain of weeks, days, hours, and minutes, each containing a germ of our life's mystery, to be unfolded only by ourselves, as we grope our way onward to the end.

A year ago Margaret Brookland's life began—not her life of the body, but her life of the soul, which had, until then, lain dormant. It woke up in that pleasant season of the year when the spring is waking the world of nature, and buds begin to swell and burst, and birds to carol cheerily.

Mr. and Miss Brookland had been travelling for some months, as people do sometimes travel in search of novelty or health, fancying that the faster they fly the greater their gain. A large portion of their time had been spent in their own comfortable carriage, or in the *coupé* of a railway train. They occasionally rested for a day or two at noted or attractive places, and, having "done them" in a thoroughly English fashion, went on their way again. They did not

care especially for quaint old towns or quiet cities; they loved better the works of God than the works of man, and had journeyed rapidly on, till they reached that land where His works are most glorious and grand—free for all eyes to behold, and everlasting. For a few days they remained in the beautiful valley of Interlaken, sauntering beneath “the wide arms of its giant trees,” or making excursions in the neighbourhood. They lingered for a time by the lovely lake of Brienz, which lies so fair and calm at the foot of the rugged mountains, and listened to the roar of the Giessbach, which rolls echoing like the booming of cannon over the face of the calm blue water. They put up at the primitive little Hôtel de l’Ours, at the extremity of the lake, and spent many a charming day wandering about the village, or along the shore, or watching the dexterity of the wood-carvers as they executed their delicate and elaborate work. When evening came, they sat in the pleasant little garden, bright with flowers and laden with perfumes, listening to the soothing ripple of the lake and feeding the gay fish that darted about with the rapidity of lightning.

From Brienz they went on to Chur, where they remained for a day’s rest in the Hôtel Lukmanier, previous to their descent into Italy over the Splügen pass. The morning they left Chur was as bright and fresh as any in

“The flow’ry May, who from her green lap throws
The yellow cowslip and the pale primrose.”

There was a great stir and bustle both within and without the hotel. Travellers hurried along the landings, and swarmed in and out of the open doorway like busy bees of a well-stocked hive, carrying with them, however, no burthen of honey, but one of gall and bitterness. None of their faces bore that smiling look of satisfaction which generally lights up the countenance when people have been well-served and properly entertained. No pleasant words of thanks or farewell fell from the travellers’ lips, but some shade of discontent or annoyance seemed to hover over them all. Luggage had got mixed or misplaced; some had been sent in mistake to the railway-station, and some might possibly be found lying between Chur and Paris, while its

owners were wending their way into Italy. What cared mine host of the Hôtel Lukmanier for their grievances?—his accounts were paid, including a heavy charge for service which had been left undone. Some sustained their small vexations patiently; others muttered their discontent one to the other; while some, of the true British breed, grumbled aloud and showed every inclination to rebel openly against the vexations of the hour. The foremost of these was a tall, bony individual, with high cheek-bones, a bronzed countenance, and shrewd, intelligent eyes, who looked like a well-to-do West of England farmer; and few men of that description passed that way. He created more than one smile, by his excited look and manner, rather than by his words.

“I don’t complain of their charges,” he said, addressing nobody in particular, but looking around in search of sympathy. “When a man is fool enough to leave his own country, he nat’rally expects to be cheated.”

“No need to leave his own country for that,” remarked one of the bystanders; “we may be very comfortably cheated at home.”

The old gentleman wheeled round upon the speaker in a spirit of self-vindication; but a spice of humour glistened in his eye as he answered,—

“I never said things was all fair and straight at home—far otherwise, or there wouldn’t be so much work for you gennelmen of the law.”

“So I’m a lawyer, am I?” answered the person addressed, casting from beneath his bushy brows a scrutinizing glance on the old farmer’s face, as though he was going to pose him in a stiff cross-examination; “I should like to know by what spirit of divination you found that out?”

“I don’t purtend to divinity—I’m content to be a good Christian myself; but—no offence to you, Sir—there’s more people knows Tomfool than Tomfool knows; an’ I seen you at the ‘Sizes down Cornwall—I got a lick the rough side of your tongue myself, but I give you back as good as you brought—some folk said better.” He smiled as he spoke, as though satisfied with his prowess in legal warfare, and bearing no grudge on the old score.

This brief colloquy created some laughter among those who were near enough to hear it, and for a moment they forgot their own vexations. So easily, and by such light things, are men's thoughts diverted from one channel into another, sometimes wandering so far away that they never return into the original stream.

Carriages rolled over the rough stones to the inn-door, were soon filled, and driven away. Next, the diligence rumbled along to take up its freight of passengers. The old gentleman called out to his wife and daughter to make haste. Obedient to his summons, they quickly appeared, laden with books, baskets, and band-boxes sufficient for the use of three times their number.

The daughter was, perhaps, scarcely important enough to justify a description of her; yet there was something marvellously attractive in her face, although at first sight it was not striking: but those who looked at it once were always tempted to look again, and generally found some pleasure in looking. It might be called a thoroughly characteristic face, just such a one as people would be inclined to speculate upon, and would take the odds in its favour against the world. Looking at her, however, from an artistic point of view, every feature was imperfect, yet in their very imperfection lay an inexpressible charm. There was an odd mixture of thought, sentiment, and shrewd common sense in the young girl's face, which was illumined by large violet grey eyes. There were no bright glossy braids or golden tresses hidden beneath her large straw hat, but a mass of short dark crisp hair that could not be coaxed to lie flat, or to take any form but that obstinate coil given to it by nature. It was not that sort of hair which poets generally rave about, but it must have been of just such a kind that Morris thought when he wrote,

“Not greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow colour fair—
But thick and crisped wonderfully,
Beata mea Domina !

“Heavy to make the pale face sad,
And dark, but dead, as though it had
Been forged by God most wonderfully,
Beata mea Domina !”

Her mother, who had followed her down the stairs, was a tall angular figure, with strongly marked features, and a pious cast of countenance. Glancing from one to the other, it seemed impossible to suppose that, even in her palmiest days, the matron could have resembled the girl. The family property was extensively exhibited in the shape of luggage, which might have contained the entire wardrobe of half-a-dozen families. Every box and package was labelled in large letters, "Nutford."

Mr. Nutford himself superintended, as well as he was able, the disposition of his effects. One after another the passengers proceeded to take their places. A young gentleman in a fanciful costume seemed bent on encroaching on Mr. Nutford's rights, for he called to his daughter impatiently—

"Come, Lucy, make haste, or we shall lose our places; and just tell that young chap as them seats are ourn—you understand their lingo."

In tolerably good, or, at least, understandable French, Lucy did his bidding. Her voice was soft and pleasant, but it had a ring of decision in it, as though she could speak well, and to the purpose too. The Nutfords clambered into their seats. Lucy blushed in a shy girlish fashion as she ascended. Mrs. Nutford followed like a sturdy British female, who was by no means afraid of compromising her dignity, or outraging her modesty, took possession of her seat, and looked around her as though she had performed a gymnastic feat, and was expecting admiration, if not applause.

Her husband was slowly following her, when he was attacked from behind, and forcibly detained by a coarse German Frau, who held him fast by his coat-tails with one hand, while with the other she flourished a paper before his eyes. It was the unpaid washing-bill of the Nutford family. Having escaped from her grasp, he buttoned up his pockets and seated himself, motioning her to be off. The virago poured out a volley of invectives, deluging him with low German slang. Mr. Nutford was not slow in retorting in homely English, uttered in a strong western dialect. Though neither understood the other, there was no mistaking their meaning,

"Not a penny of my money do you get!" he exclaimed. "If there was any justice to be got in a foreign land, which of course, there isn't, I'd bring an action 'gainst you for spiling my property; for," he added, looking appealingly round him, "I'm travelling with a reeking laundry packed in my portmanty, and she wants to be paid for it!"

"Well, we are all in the same boat," said one of his fellow-passengers, who happened to be an Englishman; "this is not the first time I have been served this trick—of course it's no good to show fight; you had better pay her and have done with it."

"That's as much as to say sit down and have yer pocket picked quietly. Not if I know it! Oh! go on; jabber away as hard as you like—you sha'n't jabber a penny out of my pocket!"

Here Lucy broke in saying—

"It is no use standing out, father; you must give in at last. I can see that the hotel people take the woman's part, and there will be some bother with the police. We all seem to be fellow-sufferers. That gentleman, you hear, has been served just the same way."

The idea of having a partner in his distress slightly mollified Mr. Nutford's wrath; he began to feel that he was making himself unpleasantly conspicuous by rebelling against an annoyance to which everyone else had yielded. He reluctantly drew from his pocket a five-franc piece, which he flung upon the pavement, saying—

"There, then, take that—it will help to pay your passage to the devil!"

The virago descended from her position, and groped greedily for the coin, which had rolled into the gutter. The coachman cracked his whip, and the heavy lumbering machine started off, the merry tinkling of the horse-bells, as the steeds trotted briskly along, making a pleasant sound in the morning air.

In the shadow of the doorway of the hotel, Mr. and Miss Brookland had been standing silent and amused spectators of the passing scene. As Margaret Brookland is the heroine of this veritable story, she is entitled to a special presentation to the reader. She could scarcely be called tall, though she was slightly above the middle height. Her slender,

graceful figure was admirably set off by the tasteful travelling-dress she wore ; her delicately arched neck, and the proud carriage of her head, reminded one of the stately-sailing swan. Her hair had a rich golden hue, and looked like a mass of solidified sunbeams ; she had large soft dreamy eyes, shadowed by long silky lashes. When in repose, her fair face had an expression of deep thoughtfulness ; but no catalogue of features would afford a correct idea of her beauty. Let each reader conceive for himself the perfection of fair young womanhood in all its ripening charms, then he will have some idea of Margaret Brookland.

“To those who know her not, no words can paint,
And those who know her know all words are faint.”

The father and daughter were evidently anxious to pursue their journey. The diligence had scarcely rolled off, when a handsome English travelling-carriage, perfectly appointed, drove up to the door. A man-servant in plain clothes announced that all was ready. Mr. Brookland handed in his daughter, and took his seat beside her. The maid ascended into the rumble, was quickly joined by the valet, and off they started.

“I am very glad to get out of this place, Maggie,” said Mr. Brookland ; “this is the first real annoyance we have had since we left home. I do believe that rascally laundress is in league with the landlady.”

“It is very vexing,” said his daughter, cheerfully ; “but never mind, papa—do not let the idea of damp shirts damp your spirits ; these little worries should go for nothing—they are as light and unsubstantial as soap bubbles. In walking through this world, you know, we must shake off the rain-drops as they fall—I always do.”

“You little moralist !” replied her father, smiling, “you have never been caught even in a summer shower.”

“That has nothing at all to do with it,” said Margaret, shaking her head wisely, “I know all about it just the same. You know the song says—

‘In every life some rain must fall,
Some days be dark and dreary.’

Some people have their troubles in one long stormy shower ; others have them sprinkled over a life. I wonder which is best ? I think I would rather have my troubles fall on me as thick as a hailstorm, and have done with them, than in drizzling showers."

"Do not talk of troubles," said Mr. Brookland, with that nervous trepidation which sensitive people sometimes feel at the name of a disagreeable thing ; "I hope you will enjoy sunshine to the end of your days."

"I am sure I shall, so long as you can make it," answered the young girl affectionately. "I often think, papa, what a pity it is we have so little power over our own lives, or the lives of those we love."

"But my dear Margaret, there is no man living who has not power, in a greater or less degree, over the lives of others. Every life, as it moves onwards, has some influence, visible or invisible, over the lives of other people."

"That is exactly what I mean," she answered, "but the invisible influence often baffles all visible endeavours ; for instance, papa, it is impossible for you, with all your affectionate care, to carve out my life, and make it such as you or I might wish it to be."

"I think we have managed to carve it out pretty well up to the present time, Maggie," he said, laughing.

"Yes, but there is no knowing how near we may be to the end of the present time," she dreamily replied. "They say it is a long lane that has no turning, and as we cannot be happy for ever—I mean happy in the same sort of way—I am afraid every day that we may turn some sharp corner, and stand face to face with something we do not like."

"Then shut your eyes, my dear, and do not look at it."

She was silent for a moment, and then looking up into her father's face, she said thoughtfully,

"I suppose if we each had the power to select our own lives, we should have some difficulty in choosing. I often wonder, papa, if yours is exactly the sort of life you would have chosen ; you seem always to have walked in pleasant ways."

"Do not talk of my life, Childie," he answered gravely ; "it is all past and gone. I daresay, like the rest of the world, I have had my strokes of ill-fortune. Few men can

live to my age and say they are satisfied with the lives they have lived, or the things they have done."

"Well, I suppose not. Do you know, papa, young as I am, I do not think I am quite satisfied with life, although it has always been pleasant to me?"

"I should say it had been a constant feast of roses, Maggie."

"You always laugh when I am serious," she said; "but you must know that, though I have no troubles of my own, I can feel for other people. I can't help fancying that what is happening to them now may one day happen to me."

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," replied Mr. Brookland; "for the present use your eyes in admiring this glorious and sublime scenery. I scarcely know whether these regions appeal most to the eye or the ear. The roar of the cataract breaking the almighty silence is perhaps as terrible as the gaze down into the bottomless chasm. This is the first time you have been abroad among the mountains in the spring-time."

"Ay, but it was a great effort for me to tear myself away from home at this time. Of all seasons in the year, I love spring the best, and nowhere can it be so fresh and beautiful as in England, and at Brooklands especially."

"True, but here, among the mountains, it bears a different character," said Mr. Brookland. "At home we have all the soft fresh tender beauty of nature; but here it sweeps with a glorious majesty over these mountains regions. Look at these lofty peaks rising one above another, their icy crowns gleaming and glittering in the sunshine, 'gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.'"

The spring had indeed commenced its sway on those lofty mountain-tops, loosening the frozen waters and sending them leaping like headstrong youths into the world; thundering from rock to rock through gloomy chasms and narrow gorges, till, with a rushing roar of gladness, they dash themselves down upon their stony bed fathoms below the traveller's feet.

"Stop the carriage, papa; let us be still for a moment, and look around and listen. Is it not awfully grand?—it almost takes away my breath."

It was, indeed, as Margaret said, "awfully grand," They

had entered the "Via Mala," and were driving along a narrow ledge, which human ingenuity and toil had made along the rugged sides of lime-stone rocks, rising perpendicularly on both sides to a fearful height—pile upon pile—their sharp outlines standing out against the sky in grand sublimity—so lofty were they as almost to shut out the light. The sun's rays certainly could not penetrate to the spot where the travellers were then standing. A little further on the face of the rocky mountain was less bare ; its rugged features were clothed with thick clusters of black gigantic pines. Here and there were patches of mosses peeping up amidst the rough roots of indigenous trees. Conspicuous were the larch and the wild laburnum, whose yellow buds were just bursting forth like a shower of gold from a skilful pyrotechnist amidst darkness and gloom. Here and there the sparkling waters came trickling down in graceful curves, like silver threads lacing the mountain sides.

Father and daughter looked down and around on the sublime scene, then at the narrow strip of sky above them, and were awe-stricken by the savage grandeur of the spot.

"What a fairy-like place this must be in winter, when these living rills are frozen and ice-bound, jutting out from the rock in silver chords," said Margaret, in those half-sounding tones we use when fear and wonder soften the feelings and make even admiration a solemn thing. "As I look around me now, I can quite understand the superstitious legends that have been born and fostered in these mountainous regions. Look up that dark narrow gorge yonder. I can fancy I see the Erl-king with his stormy locks flying along in the shadow of the mountain ; or glancing down upon the rushing water I catch a glimpse of Undine's pale sweet face gleaming through the feathery foam—her long hair and white arms tossing and tumbling in the glittering spray."

"My imagination is not so vivid as yours, my child," answered Mr. Brookland ; "I look on these things with plain prosaic eyes, and only wonder at the great and stupendous works of the Creator. In every rock and rough stone I can trace His mighty hand. Here, among these lonely mountains, I feel His presence more than in towns and cities, where men have built churches and altars for His wor-

ship. For my part, I have a great respect for the ancient Druidical religion, Maggie. It was a fine thought to worship God among the everlasting hills and mountains, with no other canopy than Heaven, and to make the work of His mighty hands an altar for praise and prayer."

"I have a fancy for the old Pagan religion," replied Margaret; "I think there is something beautiful and grand in the idea of investing everything that is glorious with a spirit of divinity, giving to each a separate god, to the sea, the winds, the rivers, and the flowers."

"There is no need to go to the Pagan religion for that," answered Mr. Brookland. "We Christians are more enlightened, and array all things with the spirit of divinity—only instead of giving to each a separate god, we acknowledge one universal God, who is the ruler and creator of all."

"Well, yes," returned Margaret, leaning lazily back as the carriage rolled on, "I suppose we are more enlightened, but that does not prove that we are a bit happier. We may be no worse for our enlightenment, but I do not believe we are much better. There is just as much wickedness in the world now as then, perhaps more, for it is more refined and subtle. There may have been more superstition then, but certainly less scepticism. I would rather believe in a thousand gods than in none. In the one case I might be oppressed with belief; in the other I should be crushed with despair, which is the worst of all evils."

"My dear Margaret," said her father, smiling, "what can you know of good or evil?"

"Not much, certainly, from my own experience; but I have managed to pick up a good deal of knowledge from other people—remember lookers-on sometimes see more than the players. And even in the garden of Eden our great mother Eve managed to find out something about good and evil, as we all know to our cost."

In such half-joking, half-serious conversation, they beguiled the time. The carriage rolled on through scenes of varied beauty—luxuriant and serene, rugged and sublime. The rough grey rocks, piled in huge masses one above another, looked doubly solemn and dark as the evening shadows began to fall. The twilight was fast deepening into night. Mr. Brookland began to wonder if they were

far from their destination. On expressing to the coachman some alarm at being in the pass when night had closed in, he was answered :—

“There is no danger, Sir; we who are accustomed to these mountain passes could drive over them blindfolded; but see,” he added, pointing to a clump of trees to the right, “yonder is the Splugen Hotel, where we rest for the night.”

Crack went the whip, and the horses trotted briskly on.

Every one who has travelled over this magnificent pass, must remember the sharp up-hill curve on turning into the yard of the Splugen Hotel; it is so abrupt and sudden as to need the most cautious driving. Either deceived by the dusky light, or anxious to drive to the door in a dashing style—for he was rather proud of his passengers—the coachman lashed his horses; he was driving four-in-hand; the leaders started suddenly round, and the hind wheel came in contact with a projecting rock.

There was a loud crash; the wheelers began to kick and plunge violently—the carriage swung to and fro—the women shrieked. There was a moment of terrible suspense—then it turned over. Help was at hand, and the occupants were extricated from their perilous position, all more or less bruised and shaken. Margaret was lifted out insensible, and carried into the vaulted hall of the Splugen Hotel.





CHAPTER II.

MEETINGS AND PARTINGS.

“How many meet who never yet have met,
To part too soon, but never to forget !”



R. BROOKLAND was as much bewildered by excitement as by the clashing of the many tongues around him, that created a perfect Babel of sounds. Every one was anxious to be of service, and in his very anxiety impeded the endeavours of everybody else. The insensible girl was surrounded by eager well-wishers, one suggesting one thing, another dissenting and proposing something else—all opposed to and contradicting each other, and nobody having the least tangible idea of what was necessary to be done. Mr. Brookland could not understand a word of the *patois* that tripped so glibly from their tongues ; he only knew from their gestures that they were full of kindly sympathy, however different were their ideas and ways of showing it.

They carried Margaret at last into a room on the ground-floor, and bathed her hands and face, using the best means they knew of for her recovery. His heart sickened as he saw a streak of blood trickling slowly down her forehead. He took her in his arms, spoke to her in those tender, loving tones that always woke an answer until now ; he made inquiries, and gave incoherent orders to those around him, but no one understood a word he said. Never in his whole life had he felt so utterly helpless ; he was among strange

people, in a desolate mountain pass, with no help at hand, and where even his language was not understood ; his child was injured, but he could not tell how or where ; whilst he himself was much bruised and shaken, and, indeed, only upheld by anxiety for her. He forgot his servants, who were also hurt and frightened—his heart was filled with one thought, one care, and that was Margaret.

In the midst of his keen distress, he felt a hand laid gently upon his shoulder, and a voice in his own native English exclaimed,—

“Allow me to see the young lady—I am a surgeon.” As the speaker stepped forward, and looked down upon her, he added, “This is a fainting-fit from nervous terror—it has nothing to do with her injuries.”

Mr. Brookland could have thrown his arms round the stranger’s neck, and embraced him. Never had his own language sounded so eloquent, so sweet to his ears as now.

“A surgeon!—and an Englishman!—thank God!” he exclaimed, as he grasped the stranger’s hand.

A master-spirit had now appeared upon the scene—all confusion subsided. In obedience to his directions, without a moment’s delay, Margaret was carried up-stairs to bed.

Mr. Wynter—for that was the name of the gentleman who had appeared so opportunely on the scene—had a quiet, commanding way with him that enforced attention. He issued his orders in a manner that was not to be misunderstood. He spoke a few consolatory words to Mr. Brookland, and requested him to remain below, while he examined his patient, promising to return as soon as possible to let him know exactly the extent of the injuries Margaret had received.

He was not absent very long : there was comfort and hope in his face as he re-entered the room, and spoke cheerfully to the anxious father, saying,—

“You need be under no alarm for your daughter. There is no danger—not the slightest ; her injuries are merely superficial.”

“Ay! ay!” said Mr. Brookland, interrupting him quickly, with the feeling that what the doctor called a superficial injury might be of the gravest description in his idea. Why, even a scratch upon her finger was a serious matter to him!

He had seen blood upon her forehead, and looked upon her white face and insensible form ; he was half-angry with the doctor for using the word "superficial." "I want to know exactly how much, and where my child is hurt," he said ; "I—I saw her forehead bleeding."

"A mere scratch, which will be well to-morrow," replied Mr. Wynter, with a tender smile, and his voice was low and sweet. "I would not mislead you. I pledge you my honour that there is nothing seriously wrong with your daughter—she has sprained her ankle, and suffered a slight fracture of the collar-bone, that is all. Of course it will be some little time before she is able to walk, and she must be kept in a recumbent position for some days. Injuries like hers are always tedious, though by no means dangerous."

To Mr. Brookland's paternal mind, Mr. Wynter seemed to enumerate a long catalogue of horrors. Alas ! he thought, how soon her unpremeditated words had come to pass ! She was now suffering, and he had no power to save her from a single pang.

"My poor child—poor Maggie !" he exclaimed. "What will become of her in this wild place ?"

"Oh ! we shall do very well, never fear," replied Mr. Wynter, cheerfully. "I am myself by no means an indifferent nurse, and there is a young lady here who is anxious to be of service to your daughter. Indeed, she has been of great use already—she is with her now, while I came down to report matters to you."

"I suppose there can be no harm in my seeing my child ?" inquired Mr. Brookland. "I think I shall rest happier after I have seen with my own eyes how matters are with her. May I go to her at once ?"

"Certainly. I promised I would bring you to her, for her chief anxiety is on your account. Her first words, when she came to herself, were inquiries about you. Do not stay with her too long, or talk too much ; after all this excitement, it is necessary that she should be kept quiet, and sleep, if possible."

In spite of Mr. Wynter's re-assuring words, the father's heart beat till it seemed to knock against his ribs, as he entered the room where his daughter lay. Her face was turned towards the door expectantly. As her eye lighted

upon his face, she tried to smile—it was but a poor attempt, for she was evidently in great pain. However, she spoke cheerfully, and a spice of her old spirit lurked in her words as she said,—

“Oh! papa, I know you have come to scold me. What a silly girl I was to give you such a fright! I only fainted, I could not help it; but there is nothing the matter really—I am scarcely hurt at all. Pray do not look so anxious,” she added, earnestly, for she saw he was deeply agitated. Her endeavour to seem cheerful touched him the more deeply, as he knew it was for his sake she tried to cover her pale face with smiles.

“My poor darling!” he said, bending caressingly over her, and fondling her in that soft loving way that is so mutely eloquent when words would seem so weak. They were both silent for a second, then he inquired anxiously, “Are you in much pain, darling? Tell me, do not be afraid of grieving me. The only way to keep my mind at ease is to let me know the truth.”

“Well, yes, I am in pain, papa dear, of course,” she answered, reluctantly. “I daresay I feel it more than anybody else would, because I am not used to suffer; but never mind, you will see how bravely I shall bear it, especially if you will promise to be cheerful, and not anxious about me. Tell him, doctor, there is no cause for anxiety.”

“I have already assured him of that,” said Mr. Wynter, “and now he has seen you, I hope he will be more content. There, no more talking, you have talked quite enough, and if we wish things to go well, you must keep quiet.”

Upon this hint Mr. Brookland spoke a few parting words to her, and turned to go. However, before he left the room, he was anxious to have everything arranged for her comfort; and, among other things, he inquired for her maid, for up to this time he seemed to have forgotten everything but Margaret herself.

“Your daughter’s maid is not in a fit state to attend to anything at present,” said Mr. Wynter. “She has sustained some slight contusions, but is, in reality, more frightened than hurt. Being in a very nervous and excitable state, she is by no means fit to enter into a sick-room.”

"Then I will remain here—my child must not be left alone."

"No, we have provided against that," replied the doctor. "This young lady, who only arrived here an hour ago, has kindly volunteered her services, and has already promised to watch by Miss Brookland till the morning."

His words directed Mr. Brookland's attention to the young girl Lucy, who had been seated by the bed-side, but on his entrance had withdrawn to the other end of the room, and remained there unnoticed until now, when she came forward in answer to Mr. Brookland's grateful salutation. His eye scanned with a doubtful look her slight girlish figure, and she seemed to read his thoughts, for she said promptly,—

"You think I am too young for such an important trust? I am not very experienced, it is true; but then I am very wakeful, and shall give strict obedience to the doctor's orders."

"If you do that, I shall be content," answered Mr. Wynter, "for it is all that is necessary."

Mr. Brookland made his grateful acknowledgments to the young girl who had come forward to serve him in such an extremity. He took her hand, and, in the courteous fashion of old days, bent over it as he uttered his thanks. A last look, a last word to Margaret, and the doctor drew him from the room.

As soon as the day broke, Mr. Brookland was astir, anxious for news of his daughter. More than once during the night he had crept down in the darkness, and listened at her door to hear if she moaned, or was in pain; but all was still. Now he found courage, and went down and tapped boldly at the door, which was opened by Lucy, looking bright and smiling; her face was an index that told him all was well, before she spoke. He learnt that his daughter had slept nearly the whole night—indeed, was still sleeping peacefully.

"Would you like to see her?" Lucy asked; "you may if you come in quietly, and go out again without disturbing her."

Obedience was readily granted. Having ascertained that all was going favourably with his darling, he returned to his

own room with a lighter heart, for it had lain as heavy as lead in his breast all night, or if he had felt its beating at all, it was like a muffled march of sorrow. Now, as he threw open his window and looked out, he felt a reviving interest in life and its surroundings. Grey misty clouds hung over the tops of the mountains, and fell in thin vapoury folds down their rugged sides, till they disappeared and were lost in the valley below. He stood there waiting and watching, till the clouds slowly drifted away one by one, and the sun rose like a round red globe of fire, and lighted up hill and valley, rock and snow-capped mountain, far and near, with a flush of rosy light. The scene was magnificent; in the dusky gloaming of the night before, he had conceived but a faint idea of its savage grandeur.

The first person he encountered, as he descended to the *salle-à-manger*, was Mr. Wynter, who had just left the sick-room. Mr. Brookland grasped his hand, saying,—

“Well, doctor, what of your patient?”

“Better than even I could have expected,” he answered, returning the cordial greeting with equal cordiality; “though of course you do not think of resuming your journey to-day, nor indeed for many days?”

“We are only travelling for pleasure, and it is really of no consequence when or where we go,” replied Mr. Brookland. “I can think of nothing now—I care for nothing but my child’s recovery. It is most unfortunate the accident should have happened at such a place as this. But for the good fortune that sent you here, I should have been utterly overwhelmed.” He wrung the doctor’s hand with a warmth that told his gratitude as well, perhaps better, than any wordy professions could have done.

They found the long narrow table in the *salle-à-manger* already half-filled with busy tourists, some drinking their hot coffee standing, anxious to recommence their journey, and reach some special point before the heat of noon arrived. Others were seated in small groups, discussing and consulting about their future plans; some few sat taking their breakfast in a quiet orderly manner. They had nothing to discuss—their route was arranged from beginning to end. They knew exactly what they had to do, and meant to do it conscientiously, diverging neither to the right nor to the left,

but going the regular round, till time and fate set them down at their own doors again. At the lower end of the table, casting curious glances on their fellow-travellers, sat Mr. and Mrs. Nutford, slowly and solemnly dispatching their meal in true west-country fashion. An unmistakably English teapot (part of her travelling-baggage), containing her favourite brew of strong Bohea, was before the lady, and she dispensed it with no niggard hand.

Mr. Brookland recognised them instantly. He remembered the little scene that had amused him at Chur, and knew that they were Lucy's parents, to whom he felt so deeply indebted. Without a moment's hesitation he went up, introduced himself, and shook hands cordially with the old man, apologised for depriving him of his daughter's society, and expressed his deep obligation to her. He did not know how to repay her kindness, he said.

"No call to talk of payment," replied the old man; "if my gal's of use to your'n, I'm glad on it, and that's enough."

"Enough for you, who give, but not enough for me, who receive," replied Mr. Brookland. "I do not know what we should have done in this desolate place if we had not fallen into such friendly hands."

"It's our way down Cornwall to help our neighbours—same here; for, when there's trouble aboard, every man's our neighbour—indeed, Sir," he added, "he's more like a brother. I've heerd so much of this furrin gibberish, that when I hear a fellow speak good sensible English, I feel as if I could take him in my arms and"—he hesitated a moment, as though he did not know how to finish his sentence; at last he ended with—"never set him down again."

All agreed that they had felt something in the same way when travelling abroad far from home and kindred.

"I often wonder why I left home to come wandering into these strange places. Sometimes I can't really believe it's truly me, and I'm inclined to pinch myself to find out whether I'm myself or no. You'd hardly think it, Sir, but for thirty years I've never stirred a dozen miles from my own land—as pretty a bit of property as you'd see for miles round; but that's neither here nor there. I daresay you wonder what we're doin' here, runnin' about strange

countries, like a couple of old fools as we are at our age ——”

“Speak for yourself, Nutford—there’s a good half-score of years between us!” exclaimed his wife, sharply.

He did not deign to notice the interruption, but completed his own sentence, adding—“and not knowin’ a word of the lingo.”

“That’s nothing to be ashamed of,” rejoined the lady again. “The blessed Apostles never learned any language but their own, and they got through all their work with their native tongue. What was good enough for them is good enough for us.”

“They did not travel, Bessie.”

“Yes, they did; they went from one end of the world to the other, preaching the Gospel according to commandment.”

“Ay, ay,” replied Mr. Nutford, with an air of superior wisdom—“it was all very well then; but things that went down them times wouldn’t go down now. But as I was saying, Sir,” he added, resuming his address, “I daresay you wonder what brought such a plain man as me to these parts?”

Mr. Brookland was taken aback by the home-question. He certainly had wondered what brought a man of Mr. Nutford’s calibre away from his own acres. He was too polite, however, to acknowledge as much.

“I suppose, like the rest of the world, you have come on a pleasure excursion?” he said.

“Not a bit of it; it was Lucy’s legacy brought us here, and I don’t care how soon it takes us back. It seems a sin to spend such a sight of money runnin’ wild like this—it is like a dead loss.”

“On the contrary,” Mr. Brookland rejoined, “I should say you had made a very good investment in the cultivation of your daughter’s mind. She is so bright and intelligent ——”

“So she is, Sir—so she is!” exclaimed the proud father; “and a real lady, too, is our Lucy. I’m a plain man myself, but she takes after her poor mother—this is my second venture,” he added, by way of parenthesis, jerking his head towards his present companion—“who was a lady born,

being first cousin to a gentleman in the illiterate line, who wrote books, also was a captain of a regiment of militia." He paused a moment to see how this piece of information was received, and then added: "I am not an educated man myself, as you may see, and I've felt the miss of it. I minded that Lucy shouldn't go to the wall for want of learning. I'm a tolerably warm man, and could afford to do it, so she have had good schooling, and a thorough polishing off afterwards. I grudged her nothing."

"That is very evident," said Mr. Brookland, glad to edge in a word, for the conversation had curved off in such a strange direction, he could only smile or assent politely to his companion's information. He was glad to speak of Lucy; she was a subject more congenial to him, and he was not sorry to have a passing glimpse into her history. "Her looks, her manners," he added, "all bear witness to her gentle breeding; you may well be proud of her, she does you credit."

"That's true, Sir; and if she was to marry a duke, she wouldn't disgrace him." A quiet smile crossed Mr. Brookland's aristocratic face; he felt a kind of pity for this proud, fond father. He was spared the necessity of a reply, for after a momentary pause, Mr. Nutford added, "She's got her faults though, has Lucy. She's read a deal in books about foreign countries, and seemed as if she was always hankering after 'em, and when the legacy fell in her lap, she was wild to spend it here among the mountains, and ——"

At this moment Lucy entered the room, looking as fresh and charming as though she had just risen from a bed of roses. Her clear young voice rang out with a pleasant sound as she glanced round with a general "good-morning," and asking for a cup of tea "strong, plenty of milk, and no sugar," proceeded at once to cut some thin dainty slices of bread and butter, in a business-like way. Mr. Brookland looked up and smiled gratefully at her as he said,—

"I see you are ministering to my whimsical child, 'strong tea, plenty of milk, no sugar'—I can almost hear her give her orders. Thank God, she is well enough to care for such trifles."

"I think you will be surprised to find her so much better

this morning," replied Lucy. "She has been asking for you ; will you come up now ?"

"I shall be only too happy," replied Mr. Brookland, rising with alacrity.

"If you like you may help me to carry up her breakfast," said Lucy, handing him a plate of bread and butter. Even carrying bread and butter was "doing something for Margaret," and her father undertook the office cheerfully.

He found her looking almost herself. She was lying on a rude sort of couch before the open window, which gave upon a wide panoramic view of the mountains, the early sun tipping their tops with gold. She looked out calm and smiling on the beautiful landscape, noting the lights and shadows that drifted along the face of the skies. Things bright, new, and strange floated before her eyes. She saw nothing of the things bright, new, and strange that were floating into her life. She and Lucy had become great friends during the few hours that they had been together. They had already sworn an eternal friendship, and sealed it with a kiss ; had mutually agreed that Margaret's accident was rather a fortunate occurrence than otherwise, designed by a kind providence to bring their kindred souls together. After all preliminary inquiries had been made and satisfactorily answered, respecting Margaret's health, and they were left alone together, she nestled up to her father's side, saying,—

"Do you think you could manage to spend a few days happily here, papa ?"

"If it is necessary for your health and comfort, darling, certainly," he replied.

"The doctor says I shall not be able to put my foot to the ground for many days."

"We will get you all right sooner than he fancies, Maggie ! How lucky it is I brought my box of galvanic chains ! I do not wish to interfere with the doctor's treatment, but I think if you will put one chain twisted round your ankle, it will not only give you great ease, but will facilitate your recovery."

"I will ask Mr. Wynter about it," she answered, gravely.

"It is no use asking him, he is sure to be against it," said Mr. Brookland hastily. "Doctors have no faith in anything

but their own prescriptions : they will never entertain a new idea. But you can speak from experience, you know how I cured your friend Mrs. Creamly."

"That was when there was nothing the matter with her, papa : she only suffers from nervous attacks, which she creates and cures according to fancy."

"That is a most ungenerous speech, Margaret, since you have felt the marvellous effects of the chain yourself," said Mr. Brookland, in accents of grave rebuke.

"Ah, well, I do not mean to run against any of your pet theories, papa ; and if I do not get well soon, I will certainly try the chain. But let us talk of something else now—is not this a charming place?—do not you think it will be delightful to spend a few days here in the heart of these wild mountains. I think there is something quite romantic in our adventure."

"An unfortunate romance for you, my poor child," he answered caressingly. "I should prefer a dull reality that brought no pain."

"Ay, but all painful things have a tinge of pleasure somewhere. I do not mind the pain I suffer at all, for it has brought me acquainted with such an agreeable companion. Is not Lucy a dear girl, papa? She has told me all about herself. I must have her to come and stay with me at Brooklands, and I shall go and see her in Cornwall."

"But, my dear Margaret," began Mr. Brookland, amazed at the rapidity with which she was weaving a web of intimacy.

"But—is an ugly word in a pet papa's mouth," said Margaret, stopping it with a kiss. "I know all you are going to say, about Lucy being a farmer's daughter, and all that ; but see how pretty and ladylike she is ! and as well educated as I am. I have often heard you say, papa, that education is the thing that sets the seal of superiority on a man."

"Yes, my child, but a great deal depends on the sort of man on whom the seal of superiority is set ; it is not always easy to make a fine impression upon human nature. As in the curative science, the effect of the medicine depends greatly on the temperament of the patient. I do not wish to be ungenerous or ungrateful, Margaret, indeed I am very much prejudiced in favour of this young person ——"

"Young person!" echoed Margaret, interrupting him with pretended indignation. "I will not have any friend of mine called a *young person*! But what about the doctor, papa? Is not he charming?"

"The doctor charming!" repeated Mr. Brookland, elevating his eyebrows.

"Oh! of course, his deformity is frightful, I was thinking of his manner and his face; he is so gentle, and he has the finest and kindest eyes in the world. If am sure that, although his body is so small, he has a large and glorious soul."

"It has taken you but a very short time to discover the attractions of your friends."

"There is a kind of magnetic attraction in the air, papa, an attraction that draws together like to like. Lucy has gone down to coax her father to stay here a few days till I am better. I daresay he will, for he seems to spoil her as much as you spoil me."

"The doctor, of course, will remain here, until you are quite recovered; it is his professional duty," said Mr. Brookland.

"But, my dear papa," said Margaret, "I do not like you to take Mr. Wynter's care as a matter of course; I do not believe he is here on a professional tour, but a pleasure excursion."

"Well, my child, and the advent of a profitable patient will not render his excursion less pleasant, rest assured of that."

Margaret, with half playful earnestness, upbraided her father for not being grateful enough for the good help Providence had sent them.

At his daughter's solicitation, Mr. Nutford willingly consented to postpone his journey for a day, when it was supposed that Margaret's maid would be sufficiently recovered to resume her attendance on her young mistress; he professed to be rather glad of an opportunity to spend another day among the mountains.

"I shall enjoy a scrambling peregrination among these deep ravines, and rugged gorges," he said. "You see, Sir, travelling by these diligent coaches ain't according to my idea of enjoyment, nor I don't believe it's according to

anybody else's idea. Talk of enjoying scenery, people don't enjoy it, leastways not here among the mountains."

"Then why does all the world flock to Switzerland?"

"Why? because wherever one fool goes, you'll find many; they follow one another like a flock of wild geese, cackling their admiration according to order. Crawling in carriages along these made mountain roads ain't seeing the country. Them as really likes fine scenery, as *I* do, will find it out for themselves, and take a deal of trouble to get it. Why, only yesterday as you must have seen, we passed through some wonderful fine bits of scenery, where one would like to wander from sunrise to sunset, and then not have half enough of it; but nobody seemed to mind it. They kept on smoking and chaffing, till the driver pulled up and showed 'em some particular spot, and told 'em what it was. Then they blared out admiring as hard as they could. It's the same thing at home; folks come down to Cornwall talking mighty fine about the scenery and all that, but lor bless you, so as the roads is smooth and easy, and the 'pikes few and far between, they don't care much about it. There's a deal of sham about these things, Sir."

"There is some sham in most things," answered Mr. Brookland, "but then there is a great deal that is true."

"Maybe, yes, Sir, but the sham mostways turns up, and somehow, there seems to be more of it. Why, even down here they are trying to make a sham of what God has made glorious and real. I seen a waterfall in some crackjaw place that was kept under lock and key, like a wild beast, and only shown at night, lighted up with blue fire and a band of music playing."

Mr. Brookland found a novel sort of pleasure in talking to Mr. Nutford; there was much common sense quaintly expressed in his observations upon people and things, and a shrewd, homely wit in his general remarks. They became very good friends during the few days they were compelled to spend together at the Splügen Hotel. A succession of stormy weather detained them as prisoners there, for no one cared to face a storm in that wild, desolate range of mountains. They were all thrown upon themselves, or upon one another for amusement. It was strange to see how the engrossing elements of each character came out, amalgamated

together, and served to make the time pass pleasantly. Each contributed his mite, and for the time being helped to create the world around him. Though differing in almost every essential point, in social position widely apart, yet they harmonised pleasantly together. Mr. Nutford liked talking, and Mr. Brookland was a most courteous listener. Circumstances threw them so much together that he found himself, one gusty night, discoursing and familiarly discussing agricultural matters with the west country farmer. Mr. Wynter was much occupied with Margaret, anxiously hovering over her and watching her fancies and ministering to her lightest wish—indeed, to her, the time would have passed drearily without him. He seemed to have an inexhaustible resource within himself, and opened his store freely to her and to Lucy, who was her constant companion. He told them anecdotes and wild weird stories of the mountains, manufactured on the spot, he said, and solely for their amusement. They were indeed a very sympathetic trio, and had many thoughts and feelings in common; they had read the same books, admired the same authors, and were partially agreed in their appreciation of the same musical composers, past and present. With such varied matter for conversation, it is no wonder they found even the long dull days short and bright—too short and brief and bright for some of the party. Mr. Brookland spent many hours of the day in his daughter's room; but when the story-telling or poetical readings began, he gradually dropt asleep; even the low, musical voice of Paul Wynter failed to keep him awake.

They had spent some few days in this pleasant companionship. The weather gradually cleared, the rain no longer poured down the hill-side to swell the torrent below, the clouds were lifted from the hill-tops, the mist cleared away from the valleys, and the sun once more shone out genial and bright. The next morning Lucy and her father were to resume their journey. The first link in the chain that had briefly bound them was to be snapped asunder. One by one they would soon be parted, each drifting away down the current of life; the magic circle loosened and broken perhaps never again to be re-united—certainly never under the same auspices, nor in so wild a scene as those desolate mountains.

Under certain circumstances, friendship and affection

ripen with marvellous rapidity, as some fruits grow rich and mellow under a southern sun, that would for ever remain poor and tasteless in a colder clime. People may meet and bow and exchange mere common-places in London society for a dozen years, and still be strangers to each other, except in name ; but thrown familiarly together in any lonely place, their hearts grow warm and expand, a glimpse of the real nature reveals itself, and whatever is harmonious and true in each will blend with the other, and make the music of a life. It is so that the most lasting friendships have been formed ; and so long as the world lasts thus will they go on forming still. It seemed to Margaret Brookland that she could never have so dear a friend as Lucy had become. The thought of parting on the morrow cast a shade over both their faces as they sat together, hand clasped in hand, in twilight, looking out over the mountains as the sun went down, exchanging promises, and making plans for the future ; for Margaret said they must meet again soon in her pleasant home at Brooklands.

"No," said Lucy, "the first visit must be paid to me in Cornwall ; you must see us in our own home, with home-ways and home-things about us. You may be shocked at our plain Cornish fashion and ——"

"Drop your acquaintance ? Very likely," said Margaret. "But then I am afraid I should hurry back, as though I had lost a jewel, and have no rest till I had picked it up again. Are you really sure you go to-morrow, Lucy ?"

"Quite sure ; when my father has once made up his mind, he never changes it again, as some men do."

"Well," sighed Margaret, "I have been very happy here, but now that you are going away I shall long to be going too. I wonder how much longer we shall be obliged to stay here ? I can almost put my foot to the ground now—I mean I can bear to stand upon it with very little pain."

"Here comes Mr. Wynter, I daresay he can tell you," said Lucy, as the doctor entered the room.

"I was just wondering when we should be able to leave this place," exclaimed Margaret, with an inquiring glance on Mr. Wynter's face. "Can you give me any idea ?"

"Soon, too soon, I fear—I mean I hope," replied Mr. Wynter, correcting himself. "Are you so very eager

to be gone?" he added, with an anxious earnestness in his eyes, as if he hoped she would express some regret at going.

"Of course I am," she answered. "How can you ask such an absurd question? I shall be thoroughly wretched when Lucy has gone away."

"You will have to try your hand at consoling as well as curing, when I am gone," said Lucy, with a bright smile; "and I am selfish enough to hope you will find it a difficult task. I do not want Margaret to be too easily consoled."

"Difficulties were made to be surmounted, and I shall endeavour to console Miss Brookland simply by amusing her. My stock of legendary lore is not half exhausted. When it is, I shall call in the aid of Morris ——"

"Oh! dear Morris," said Margaret, interrupting him, "he is always fresh and new. Reading Morris is like living in some old cathedral town, full of stained-glass windows, and monuments of stone, with some sweet yet solemn fancies playing over everyone and flitting everywhere. His verses are like richly-cut gems, set in a mosaic work of quaint design and perfect skill. Yes, I daresay we shall get on for a day or two—you shall read and I will listen. Oh! dear!" she added, sighing, "this tiresome foot of mine! Do you think I shall be lame, Mr. Wynter?"

"Lame! no—absurd to think of such a thing. It is fortunate your accident was no worse. You might have broken your back."

"And been deformed for life! Oh! horrible!" and as she spoke she shuddered, and covered her eyes. At that moment the servant entered with lights. Mr. Wynter turned round and saw his own deformity reflected with hideous fidelity on the bare white walls. He too shuddered, and a smothered cry, almost a sob, broke from him. Margaret looked up quickly, and saw in a moment how painfully her thoughtless words had been illustrated. She realised the sharp pain that shot through Paul Wynter's heart. With a warm, generous impulse, she laid her soft white hand in his, saying, "Forgive me—I never thought—I never meant ——"

"To give me pain," he said, finishing her sentence for

her. "No, I am sure of that. I am so used to my burthen that sometimes I forget it is there."

Margaret had a sweet womanly way of soothing, especially when she had herself inflicted the wound, and now, by a hundred winning ways, she tried to make up to Paul Wynter for the pain she had given him. The soft light of her kind eyes penetrated to his heart, and every word she spoke fell on his ear soothingly. Having once, in her deep sympathy, laid her hand in his, she had forgotten to remove it. Paul Wynter found the healing process so sweet that he was glad to have been wounded. The trio sat there talking, and, as they were on the eve of parting, the conversation naturally took a melancholy turn. They talked of friendships made and broken, of the threads and thrums of sentiment and feeling that run through this web of life, sometimes marring its progress, or ruining its design, knotting, coiling, and complicating one thing with another, till it becomes a mere tangled skein, which there is no unravelling. Their different shades of thought tinted the words they uttered. They had each taken life from various stages, and looked upon it from a different point of view. They were still discussing when Mr. Brookland's voice was heard bidding "good-night" to some worn-out traveller. Paul Wynter suddenly remembered he had no further excuse for remaining in his patient's room, and he rose up, giving her some simple directions as to an effervescing draught to be taken in the morning. Mr. Brookland entered the room looking unusually pleased and excited. He smiled graciously at Lucy, spoke a few caressing words to Margaret, then he turned to the doctor, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes, saying,

"I have had a wonderful success, doctor, cured a fit of indigestion in two minutes and a half with *nux vomica*, in those very small doses that you will not believe in."

"I am by no means an unbeliever," replied Mr. Wynter, "but I cannot have any faith in a remedy till I have first tested its qualities."

"Your father, Miss Nutford, was threatened with an attack of rheumatism, and I have sent him to bed bound in galvanic chains, a sure preventive—he will get up in the morning as well as he goes to bed at night."

Lucy thought that very probable, but she thanked him for

his kindness ; and then "good-nights" were exchanged between Margaret and Lucy ; there were many last words, last promises, and last wishes to be uttered, and at length, mingled with all these, the last "good-night" was really said, Lucy whispering a promise to run in and have another look, another word with Margaret in the morning, before she started on her journey.





CHAPTER III.

PONDERING.

“It were all one
That I should love a bright particular star,
And think to wed it.”

MARGARET BROOKLAND and her father had left the Splugen Hotel. Paul Wynter had received their last thanks—their last farewells. He had watched the carriage as it wound up the road, bearing them farther and farther away. Margaret knew well that he was watching them, and turned once or twice and waved her handkerchief, until in the distance it looked like a mere shred fluttering in the breeze—a moment more, and it was gone.

He strained his eyes, and watched till the carriage became a mere speck in the distance, and was lost to sight. Then slowly, and with a grave thoughtful face, he re-entered the hotel, went direct to his own room, and sat down to think, for since his eyes had first fallen on Margaret Brookland's white, still face he had not thought at all.

She seemed to have taken possession of his whole soul; and merged all his faculties into the one living thought of her. In her pleasant, playful way she had written her name upon his life, and the rain of many summers must come and go before it could be washed out. The last few days seemed to have contained the essence of all that was worth living for. He had squeezed the grape, drank greedily of the

cup, exhausted the wine, and left nothing but the dregs to be scattered over the years that were to come. He felt as Adam might have felt when he was turned out of Paradise, and the gates clanged to behind him—as though there could be nothing but thorns and brambles overrunning the ground where he must henceforth labour and live.

So have myriads of frail human beings thought before him, and yet they have gone forth on the world's highway, and wandered through many pleasant places beaming with sunlight, rich with bright flowers, that might be theirs if they would stretch forth a hand to pluck them. Fortunately, pain as well as pleasure is evanescent, though it is bitter while it lasts ; and we fancy it mingles with our blood, and tightens round our heartstrings, yet time purifies the one, loosens the other, and sends it floating backwards into the sea of the past. Going forward into a new life, we forget the bitterness of the old, which time has trampled under foot.

It was no wonder that Paul Wynter felt lonely when she had gone. It seemed as though all the brightness had died out of the skies, and a thick darkness had fallen suddenly over the mountain, and closed with a solemn silence over his own heart. A long time he sat there with bowed head and closed eyes, reviewing the shifting scenes of his life. It seemed as though he had lived a hundred lives in one. The past had been hard upon him ; he had staggered beneath one bitter blow, and walked for awhile like one stunned or in a dream, then he had roused himself as from a terrible nightmare, and wandered abroad amongst those wild mountains in search of peace and resignation—not of forgetfulness, for he never thought, he never hoped to forget. His was no evanescent sorrow that time could dispel, no romantic grief that a woman's smile could brighten, or her hand lift off ;—it stood like a landmark on the shores of Time, casting a red glare upon his life, and he knew that the shadow would rest upon his grave.

As he sat there with closed eyes in silence and solitude, mentally he stood face to face with the thing that haunted him ; he thought of it and of her in the same breath ! He shivered as though a sudden chill had struck to his heart. He got up and walked about the room, trying to reason with himself. It was but a dim and hazy light that reason gave

him. One moment he resolved one thing, the next another. One moment he thought he would try to forget Margaret, the next he smiled at the folly of the thought. He knew too well she would be remembered through all the years that were to come. Paul Wynter was no idle dreamer. For a few brief hours only he forgot the stern reality of his life, and sent his thoughts out into a land of shadows, that must always be a visionary world to him. To other men it might become substantial and real—never to him. A woman's love must always be as a sealed book to him; her beauty a fair page he was unwise to look on. He knew he might as well hope to stretch out his hand and snatch a star from heaven as hope to bring Margaret down to him. Why did he think of her? Had she come into his life, only to mix gall with the bitterness that was there before?—to make the struggle to him harder and more difficult still? No! God never meant a woman's beauty to mar the energies of man. It is a cowardly thing to let the mainspring of life go down, paralyse its action, or let its works go wrong, and then cry out—"It was because *this* woman's beauty has disturbed, or *that* woman's love deceived me." Some such thought as this rose up, among many others, in Paul Wynter's mind, and, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up all smaller selfish thoughts and vain repining that, serpent-like, might have crept into his heart, and stung him to death. He had been disposed to look on life as an earnest thing—to take the rough cross-grained material fate had given him, and make the best of it. For a time his view of things had been interrupted—all thrown out of gear; he must bend all his efforts to set them right again, strive to put back his mind, and take up the thread of life where it had been broken off by the advent of Margaret Brookland. And he did try—he struggled to be brave and strong. He found the task harder than he expected. If he opened a book to read, the letters, somehow, were jumbled together in strange confusion, and instead of words and phrases, he saw her face upon the page; in everything it was the same—wherever he turned, wherever he looked, even if he did not see her face, he heard her voice. He seemed to lose the control of his own mind; something was wrong with him.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, half audibly. "I have taken the

love potion with a vengeance—it will drive me mad ! There is too much in this place to remind me of her. I will leave it within an hour.”

He was true to his word. A bachelor's luggage does not trouble him much ; the small carpet-bag, his travelling companion, was soon packed, his bill paid, and he was ready to depart. One moment of weakness he indulged in before he left those lonely mountains, as he believed, for ever. He went into the room where they had sat in the twilight on that last evening, exchanging last words, last looks, last promises. He stood as near as possible on the self-same spot, and closing his eyes, he brought the group once more before his mental vision ; he could almost fancy he felt the clasp of Margaret's soft hand as she said, half playfully, half regretfully—

“ Good-night, Mr. Wynter—I wonder when we three shall meet again ? ”

When he looked up, he could hardly distinguish the long range of mountains. A mist was before his eyes, but whether it had fallen from heaven, or risen up from his own heart, he could not tell. A moment more, and he had left the hotel, and was descending the road that led to the Via Mala, his face turned toward the west.





CHAPTER IV.

SELF-RELIANCE.

“He who depends upon his wind and limbs
Needs neither cork nor bladder when he swims.”

IN spite of his deformity, Paul Wynter was not a man to be easily forgotten. The character and power of the mind will reveal themselves through the frailest form. Though slight and small in stature, he was strong and brave in spirit, had a clear-sighted conscience and marvellous self-control. He had not the muscular strength or power of ordinary men, but what he missed in physical strength he gained in mental power. Intellectually, many a man six feet high was a dwarf beside him, and his great soul gave the character to his face. He had a broad, massive forehead, with all the intellectual faculties strongly developed, large luminous eyes, and a voice that found its way straight to the heart.

Indeed, if Margaret Brookland had parted with him there, among those desolate mountains, for ever, she would never have forgotten him. His voice would have haunted her in fits and snatches for the rest of her days, and his eyes—those sad, pleasant eyes—would have looked upon her at strange times and seasons.

Well, she was gone, and Paul Wynter turned his face homeward—at least, towards England, where he had once a home. He had no home now. The wide world was before him, and his home would be wherever he chose to

make it. For the last three months he had been a wanderer on the face of the earth—no “pleasure-tourist,” as Margaret Brookland had imagined. A heavy blow, such as might have crushed the manhood of many men, had fallen upon him, and he staggered beneath it, as a good ship may shiver and tremble beneath the blow of a mountain wave, till every plank is forced, and every inch of cord and canvas strained—still she struggles to get right, and sail before the wind again. So he had strained every nerve, and struggled with all his soul to right himself—to be strong, and preserve a brave face before the world.

He knew that change of air and scene would bring change of thought, perhaps create new hopes, new desires, for the old were fading fast from his heart. He felt that nowhere could he so surely tranquillise his mind as among the mountains of Switzerland, where the grand sublimity of nature quells all turbulent passions and breathes into men's souls a portion of her own peace. For the face of Nature always looks kindly on her children, especially when they are vexed and troubled, as though she would take them in her large everlasting arms, and hush them to rest.

Knapsack in hand, Paul Wynter had traversed a great part of Switzerland and the Tyrol on foot, not by the beaten paths, but in bye-ways. He wandered wherever fancy led him, into quaint nooks and corners, untrodden by the feet of fashionable tourists, where the advent of a traveller was a rare occurrence. There he was a being to be welcomed, perhaps wondered at, and regretted when he departed. In this way he had seen many things which are unknown to the ordinary traveller. He had familiarised himself with the manner and customs, and domestic life of the people. Wherever he found sorrow or suffering, there he was content to remain, watching over and applying himself to the relief of the sufferer. There was always a gentle kindness in his words and actions that endeared him even to the strangers amongst whom he was but a temporary guest. He would not let his spirit get corroded with idleness, that rust of the soul. He was always thinking, studying, and working, even as he tramped over the mountains. Sometimes he scrambled down deep ravines, or crawled along the tangled paths that skirted the rough bed of the roaring torrent, in

search of strange herbs and plants, whose medicinal properties might be of service to mankind. Nature had already allowed the hand and eye of science to discover and pluck out many of her secrets, but he believed there were many more to be discovered and brought to light.

So he groped his way onward, gathering seeds of knowledge of many kinds as he went along. As it happened, he had fortunately reached the Splügen Hotel about an hour before the arrival of Mr. and Miss Brookland, and was able to be of such good service to her, and, as we have seen, within an hour of their departure, he left it.

There was to be no more loitering, no more wandering by the way. He hastened back to London with all possible speed; when he arrived, there was no hesitation, no uncertainty in his movements, he established himself in a cheap lodging in an obscure part of the town, surrounding himself with all things connected with his profession, so far as he was able to possess them, books, instruments, plaster casts, and drawings of the human figure in various stages; these he arrayed with such care and neatness as to give to his bachelor abode something the look of home. As soon as he had completed his domestic arrangements, he went out early one morning, to pay a visit to Doctor Chapman, who was head surgeon of Guy's Hospital, and a Fellow of the College of Physicians as well.

At the first moment there was a look of courteous inquiry upon his face; but as Paul Wynter apologised for his intrusion, and at the same time made some allusion to having attended Dr. Chapman's lectures some two or three years since, a gleam of recognition shot across the doctor's face as he called to mind the spare solitary figure of a pale deformed student, with large sad eyes, who for weeks and months had occupied one special seat in the lecture-room and operating theatre, being always the first to arrive, the last to leave, the most punctual as well as the most intelligent of all the pupils who had come under his notice. One day that seat was empty, and he had never seen its occupant till now that Paul Wynter stood before him. No sooner did Dr. Chapman recognise him than he grasped his hand cordially, saying,—

"God bless my soul! Yes, of course, I recognise you now quite well, and I remember how sorry I was to miss you all at once. It was a pleasure to lecture before such an attentive scholar. There was no sly, practical joking with you, such as some of the youngest indulges in. You were always engaged heart, hand, and eye upon your business. I shall be very glad to be of any service to you; for I suppose you have not come here for the sole pleasure of seeing me."

"No, I have not," answered Paul frankly; "but it would surely be no wonder if I did, seeing that it was from your lips I learned some of the most valuable secrets of our profession, and to your instruction I shall owe my success, if I ever do succeed."

The spice of flattery (if truth can ever be called flattery) contained in Paul Wynter's words gratified the doctor, and he replied heartily,—

"Succeed! of course you will, every man does if he makes up his mind to it. You only need to have an eagle's eyes, a lady's hand, and a lion's heart. I shall be glad to do anything to forward your view, Mr. —, really I forget your name—I hear so many, and see so many faces, that I cannot always identify one with the other, my memory makes a sad jumble sometimes. You are not Walter Greaves?" he added hesitating.

"No," replied Paul, in a low voice, "my name is Wynter."

"I beg your pardon—" rejoined the doctor, not catching his words.

"Wynter," said Paul. And this time the words came out brave and strong.

"Wynter—Wynter," echoed the doctor, reflectively. "Ay, of course, I remember now. I have a bad memory for names, but you see I have a tolerably good one for faces."

"I must acknowledge that, since you remember mine."

"Well, and what have you been about all this time," asked the doctor, anxious to get to the point.

"Things have changed with me since I attended your lectures here. Then I was a man of good fortune, and had no other object than to be useful to my poor fellow-creatures—not for gain, but for charity."

The doctor's face fell, as though he felt he had been cheated out of an undue amount of sympathy, and he said with some disappointment in his tone,—

"I thought you were some poor devil picking up crumbs of knowledge to serve for your daily bread."

"It has come to that now."

"The medical profession is not a thing to be taken up as a mere freak of fancy—or treated as a plaything by men of fortune."

"God knows it has been no plaything to me," replied Paul earnestly, "but the most sacred as well as the most pleasant duty of my life. You see I am no object of attraction in the world," he added, alluding to his deformity with a bitter smile. "So I wished to be of use. Afflicted myself, I wished to lessen the afflictions of others; so I applied myself to the study of medicine. At one time it was my ambition, indeed my intention, to build an hospital, and—but there," he added, correcting himself, "all is changed now, and all I want is to get my bread as well as serve my fellow-creatures. I have passed my examination, and am fully qualified to act in the profession."

"And in what way do you expect me to help you? Remember I will do so gladly, if I can, but you must tell me how."

Dr. Chapman's plain, business-like manner was by no means unpleasant to Paul Wynter. He would have felt less at ease with a more punctilious and ceremonious man; so he went straight to the point.

"I fancied that there might perhaps be a vacancy for an assistant-surgeon either here or elsewhere, and you could help me to the post."

"There is no vacancy at present," replied Dr. Chapman, shaking his head; "and if there were, your chance of obtaining it would be but small, there are so many who have a prior claim. I would advise you to look over the *Medical Times*, you might find something there to suit your purpose. You can give me as your reference, unless you have more powerful and influential friends."

"You are very kind," answered Paul, "but I have never made many friends, and the few I have I should rather shun than seek now."

Dr. Chapman looked at the clock, rose up, and said briskly,—

“Would you like to walk through the wards with me? I am going there now. I have two or three rather curious cases on hand, which perhaps might interest you, especially if you love your profession, as I think you do.”

He was right, Paul Wynter did love his profession, equally as much as Dr. Chapman, but in a different way. He would have handled a wounded limb as delicately as a wounded conscience, whereas the doctor seemed to think a wound was made especially that he might have the power of curing it. He was a sharp, bright-eyed little man, with a lithe, wiry figure and a pleasant face, and there was geniality in his manner that made the general world inclined to make him their friend. He loved his profession, as he loved nothing else in the world, for he had neither wife nor child, kith nor kin, to trouble or to cheer him. So he scattered his affection freely among his pupils and his patients. The latter came in for the largest share, especially if their diseases were complicated, or their cases required an unusual amount of surgical care or skill. The more difficult the case, the more he loved the patient. Some people did say that his spirits rose to excessive brilliancy when the dark fogs and cruel frost came on, and ushered in the season of accidents with broken bones and fractured limbs. Indeed, some evil-minded person had circulated a report that at the commencement of his career he had a staff of ragged urchins in his pay, and gave the best slider on the pavement opposite his house the highest reward. Even in the bright summer-time, they said, when accidents were few, and business slackened, he was seen scattering orange-peel upon the pavements, in the hope of giving a fillip to his trade. So great was his love of his profession, his hatred of idleness; but this of course was a libel. He certainly devoted himself ardently to his work, and was indifferent to the sufferings of his patients, whom he regarded as mere machines sent into the world for his especial benefit and practice. He was a man who would thoroughly have understood and appreciated the genius of that celebrated painter who, in a moment of enthusiasm for his art, stabbed his model, in order to see the working of the human

countenance in the agonies of a violent death. However, his patients loved him, for his bright cheerful ways gave courage to the faint-hearted, and his decision encouraged the brave. Besides, they had perfect faith in his knowledge and skill.

As Paul Wynter followed him through the long hospital wards, he noticed how many a pale, wan face brightened at his approach, and how thin, attenuated hands struggled from beneath the coverlet to feel the clasp of his warm, strong hand. He had a kind word or a smile for everyone. There was no pompous condescension or false dignity in his manner, he had but one mode of conduct, and behaved with the same courtesy to the poor as to the rich. He occasionally stopped to examine some peculiar case, called Paul Wynter's attention to it, chatted with him aside, and listening to his opinions with profound attention. Paul felt that he too was undergoing a kind of examination, and spoke out and gave his opinions boldly, with the full consciousness of a man who knows every inch of ground he is going over, and has no fear of tripping. The doctor was certainly pleased with his new acquaintance. They had a long business talk together, and on parting the doctor invited him to dinner at his house in Half-moon Street. Paul, nothing loth, accepted the invitation, and punctually at the appointed hour made his appearance. They dined *tête-à-tête*, in a pleasant bachelor fashion. The host was a genial companion, full of quaint anecdotes and odd sayings; a little curious, perhaps, for he made several adroit attempts to gain some clue to the history of Paul Wynter's past; but the attempt failed. The young surgeon's secret was his own; no man had a right to it, or any part of it, and he guarded it well. Upon all matters concerning the present or the future, he was perfectly open and communicative; but upon the past his lips were sealed. When Dr. Chapman approached certain subjects touching upon the past, he fenced with the question or observation with great tact, and the doctor was too well bred to push his guest farther than courtesy warranted. However, they were mutually pleased with each other. The doctor was delighted with Paul's conversational powers, and with the intelligent and original way in which he discussed matters

which were highly interesting to them both as professional men. The large thoughtful eyes (that had haunted the doctor for many a day after he had first lost sight of him), the sweet voice and gentle demeanour of Paul, all added to the favourable impression he had created. He was so different from the generality of the young men that came under the notice of Dr. Chapman. The visit was renewed again and again. The more they saw of each other, the more their mutual regard increased. Whenever Paul Wynter chose to pay a visit to Half-moon Street, he was always warmly received. Indeed, there was a cover laid for him whenever he chose to take a seat at the hospitable doctor's table ; but as he was not the kind of man to wear out his welcome, he rarely presented himself without an express invitation, and never left without being pressed to renew his visit soon. It required great strength of mind for him to keep away ; there was something so genial and attractive in the doctor's jovial dinners, his cozy bachelor's home, lighted up with the glow of friendship and the warmth of hospitality. The very grip of the doctor's hand seemed to lay hold of Paul Wynter's heart ; while his cheery words lifted the cloud from his spirit, and raised it for a time into light and sunshine. Many and many a time, as he sat in his lonely lodging during the long day, and still longer nights, which seemed lengthened as he never thought time could lengthen to mortal man, he yearned for the sight of a friendly face, the clasp of a friendly hand, and though he knew where to find both, yet he denied himself ; he fancied it was not well for him to enjoy the good doctor's society, as he felt the reaction too much when he returned to his own lodgings. He had never thought it would be so hard to live ; he was born and bred a gentleman, was learned in many ways, and a member of one of the most useful and necessary of all the professions, and yet he could not get his bread. He had thought, on his first arrival in London, that it would be an easy thing to get an appointment as assistant-surgeon at one of the hospitals, or, failing that, to obtain a position as working-partner with some worn-out practitioner who had grown old and grey in a long life's labour, and would be willing to let the burthen fall on younger shoulders ; but there were several scores of men struggling or fighting for

the same or similar positions, and there seemed to be no chance for him. He often wandered about all day, from one end of London to the other, wherever he heard there was a chance of finding employment, and returned home at night unsuccessful, heartsick and footsore. The word was overcrowded—there seemed to be no room in it for him.

After prosecuting his search for a while, he determined to give up all endeavour in that direction, and commence life on his own account, hopefully, but humbly, according to his means, trusting to time and fortune to befriend him. He would put his shoulder to the wheel, and trust in God for the rest.

Accordingly, he quitted the single room which he had occupied on his first arrival in London, and located himself in two parlours, in the most respectable locality he could afford, which happened to be a decent dingy street, which people of a certain kind are fond of calling "genteel," where some folk struggle to keep up an appearance, and others struggle for bread. It was in a populous but poor neighbourhood, where crowds of small children came surging up from the surrounding courts and alleys, playing leap-frog upon the pavements, or making mud-pies in the gutter. Indeed, in the middle of the day, when the National and Ragged Schools disgorged their living masses, you had to pick your way cautiously through the swarming throng, for fear of tumbling over the little ones.

It was not a locality many would have chosen, but it suited Paul Wynter. He soon settled himself in his new domicile, mounted a smart brass-plate upon the door, and a bright coloured lamp swinging above, its red flaming eye glaring up and down the street like a full harvest moon, making itself visible from one end to the other. "Here, at any rate," he thought, "I shall get together a practice of some sort, though it may be a poor one; but no matter—if I can only get my bread I shall be satisfied."

When his friend Dr. Chapman heard of his arrangements, he was intensely disgusted.

"What sort of a living do you think you are likely to get in such a place as this?" he said.

"Oh! I daresay I shall get on well enough, till something better turns up," said Paul cheerfully.

"Things do not turn up of themselves," replied the doctor testily; "and I should like to know how you are to go about to look for anything? You have hung out your sign, and you must always be at your post."

"That is exactly where I intend to be; but, never fear, I shall keep my eyes open."

"You may just as well shut them, for all the good you are likely to get," said the doctor testily. "I cannot think what you are about, Wynter, burying yourself in such a hole as that! If you had asked *my* advice, I should have counselled you to take the lower part of a house in some good, West-end street, give plenty of dinner-parties, ask none but medical men to your table, then hire a handsome horse and grave-coloured brougham, and go in for a good practice at once."

"My dear friend," exclaimed Paul Wynter, amazed at the proposal, "I think that would be going in for a very bad practice. How could I get this West-end house, horse, and brougham without money?"

"On credit, of course. This is a commercial country, in which half the wealthy and well-to-do men have begun on nothing, or rather have begun on the credit system, and ended by amassing large fortunes."

"Ay, in the mercantile world that may very well be; but in the professional I think it is altogether different."

"Not at all—it is the same thing all the world over," said the doctor. "There is a species of flunkeydom in this land of ours that pays homage to wealth, or to the seeming of it; you will find that out one day, if you do not know it already. Go to a patient's house in a shabby hat, seedy coat, and dirty boots, and they grudge you a half-crown; drive up in your carriage, and they will give you a guinea with thanks. Bah! you are beginning the world at the wrong end, Master Wynter."

"I think when the end comes, it will turn out that I have begun at the right. I could not sail under false colours, doctor—that is—" he added, and there was some confusion in his manner as he spoke, "I could not make my way in the world with another man's money."

"Very few men make their way with their own. I do not advise you to play ducks and drakes with another man's capital, but merely to use it to increase your own,"

"There is such a thing as luck in the world," said Paul Wynter, "and I believe, if I were to enter into such a scheme, it would turn dead against me. I might begin with the best possible intentions, but the effect might be ruin to others, as well as myself. I could not risk that—no—I could not risk that," he added dreamily, as though his thoughts had flown to other matters, his brow contracted as though some spasmodic pain had seized his heart, and contracted that also. Dr. Chapman had seen the sort of change come over him before, and fancied that the skeleton which darkened Paul Wynter's life was brought into view, by some chance word, and wrestled with his spirit, causing it fierce pain. The doctor would have given much to be taken wholly into his confidence in order to cheer and help him more thoroughly than he could do now, while his sympathies were held at bay by Paul Wynter's reticence; however, he never pushed him in the matter, but was content to bide his time. He was too well-bred and kind-hearted to press for a knowledge of that which another wished to conceal from him. After all, he had nothing to do with the past, only with the present and the future. When he saw this strange mood come over his young friend he tried to rouse him. In the present instance he busied himself for a moment, glancing over the bookshelves, and then said,—

"I tell you what, Mr. Wynter, it is a lucky thing for you that you have a friend like me to look after you? Your skiff is too light for the freight you wish to carry, and will be swamped in getting out to sea, but *nous verrons*—when do you intend to launch her?"

"Oh! I consider her in good working order now, and shall send her afloat at once," replied Paul Wynter; "indeed I do not know what amount of cargo may be at my warehouse door already; I shall hurry home and ——"

"You will do no such thing," exclaimed the doctor. "You are going home to dine with me."

"Really, I would rather not," said Paul, sorely tempted, yet only half inclined to refuse. "I must not begin my business by neglecting it."

"Wait till you get a business before you talk of neglecting it; indeed, my dear fellow, to my thinking you had better—but there, every man knows his own business best. I have no

right to advise you—though I feel I have a right to grumble when I see a young fellow, with great professional knowledge, and talent, burying himself in such an out-of-the-way place as Pentonville. You might almost as well have gone to Seven Dials at once; there you would most likely have got together a good practice from broken heads and noses. Well, you have taken this step with your eyes wide open, though I do not believe you can see to the end of your own nose. However, act as you please, I do not mean to lose sight of you."

Paul Wynter hoped not. As they walked on arm in arm, on their way to Half-moon Street, he shifted the conversation to other matters, avoiding his own immediate concerns.

A few other friends joined Dr. Chapman's dinner party, and the next few hours passed pleasantly enough in their genial companionship—almost too pleasantly, Paul Wynter thought; for, after enjoying the cheerful hospitality of the doctor's home, the loneliness of his own solitary lodging always struck him with double force. He lingered longer than usual at the doctor's table, it being the last indulgence he intended to enjoy for some time to come, he wished to extend it to the utmost possible limits. One by one the guests departed, and he and the doctor were left alone. There were so many things to be said, so many partial confidences to be communicated, that it was past midnight before Paul Wynter rose to go, and even then the doctor followed him to the door-step with "one word more."

They stood for a moment hand locked in hand; at last the doctor said,—

"Good-night. God bless you, my dear boy, God bless you! And if ever you want a friend, remember me."

"I am never likely to forget you, never, though I live for a hundred years," answered Paul Wynter, as he went out in the dark night, and he felt as though he had left all the warmth and brightness of his life behind him.

"There is some strange mystery about that young man," said the doctor thoughtfully, as he closed the door, "and I should like to fathom it."



CHAPTER V.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

“Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object cannot live.”



WHEN a man attempts to carve out a new path of life for himself, he naturally expects to find many impediments in the way. His ignorance of the kind of obstacles he may have to encounter forms one great stumbling-block in his progress, and he is apt to find himself surrounded with difficulties, with which he is ill prepared to grapple, or overcome. He is something in the position of a general who leads his troops into an unsurveyed field, and finds himself suddenly surrounded by a host of unknown, unexpected enemies, who harras him in front and rear, till his army dwindles away, and his retreat is marked only by the wounded, the exhausted, and the dying. So Paul Wynter carried all his forces, both moral and physical, into the field with a brave heart, keen eye, skilful hand, and an indomitable will, that was resolved never to be shaken. He was prepared to meet with many difficulties; these he would struggle against and overcome, but he was not prepared to waste his energies in dull inactivity, to let that “rust of the soul” eat into his life. He could work—he longed to be up and doing. He would gladly have laboured day and night, and sleep came from utter weariness; but he could not be idle. He wanted occupa-

tion for his mind as well as his body, for it was not good for him to be at rest.

During the first few weeks of his starting in business, he waited patiently enough, for he believed that work would soon come to his hand. Meanwhile, he did not let his mental faculties lie idle ; he was up early and late reading hard, studying the most learned professional works, thinking deeply, and striving to solve such difficult questions as had puzzled and baffled the scientific researches of many generations of men. He allowed himself no time for relaxation or exercise ; once or twice, indeed, he went out for a ramble through the surrounding streets, but he grew nervously anxious, fancying he should be wanted, and hastened home to attend the summons that was so long in coming. But the spiritual part of man's nature wearies, perhaps, sooner than the body, for certainly the constant application and mental anxiety told strangely upon Paul Wynter ; his nervous system was gradually shaken, his mind confused. When he pored over his books, the letters mingled one with another, and danced before his eyes, till he could not make out their sense, and instead of words and wise phrases, he saw only the sweet face of Margaret Brookland looking out pure and distinct from the learned pages. Then he knew he must close the leaves of his mind as well as those of the book before him. Still, he would not give in. He laboured less at his books, and occupied his mind with more light and graceful studies. Being a tolerably good draughtsman, he used his pencil in sketching things and places that were endeared to him from old association. Sometimes he would walk about his rooms (one opening by folding doors into the other) for an hour together, making plans for the future, and as often rejecting them as soon as made. Sometimes, when the twilight came, he sat at his window, and looked out into the dreary street, watching the homes of his opposite neighbours, and he soon grew familiar with the faces of wives and husbands, and even the voices of the young children. It was pleasant to him—indeed, at present the only visible interest he had in the world was that which he took in the domestic life of these poor people. He could perhaps see into the interior of half-a-dozen tenements, and it was curious to observe the

different arrangements in each. He fancied that in those domestic pictures he beheld he could read the disposition and character of the several groups. Sometimes he saw the bread-winner come home, tired with the day's toil. The sight of the cheerful home seemed to gladden his eye and cheer his heart, for the firelight danced upon the faces of wife and little ones, which were all turned to him with a smile of welcome. In a moment their busy hands were about him, and in a moment the little one was in his arms, the candles were lighted, the shutters closed, and Paul Wynter was shut out even from that passing glimpse of home; it was poor and humble, but it was still home, with human interest and human love to make it passing bright. He felt doubly alone, and as he drew back, and cast his eyes round his own solitary chamber, his eye fell upon his own shadow on the wall. He shivered, and drew a sudden breath; it seemed to remind him that in weal or woe, in riches or poverty, that which brightened the humblest home could never be his. It must be as a sealed book to him. The sweet home-ties that bound other men would leave him free, but with no enviable freedom. At such moments he felt that life was a cruel thing. Why was he crushed with the weight of another's sin — deformed in body, depressed in mind? Alone, utterly alone, he could make no man his confidant, no woman his friend. At such times he could have given up the battle of his life in despair. He was tempted, like Job of old, to "curse God and die;" but the evil mood passed away, and he thought repentantly — "Perhaps it is well for me to be afflicted. Surely God knows best."

The life that lay before him looked so lonely, dark and terrible, that at times his courage almost quailed before it; but his brave heart upheld him. It required a strong nerve to bear the long dull days of inactivity that pressed heavily upon him. He would strain his ears and listen to the passing footsteps in the street, fancying that among them he heard a hurried tread, in search of help in some case of danger—it must stop at his door—but, no, all passed on. In the night he sometimes started up in a dream with the sound of the night-bell ringing in his ears, and he would spring out of bed, light his candle, and glance

up at the bell ; but it was still—it had never uttered a word—the sound had been created by his own imagination. Of the inhabitants of the house he occupied he knew absolutely nothing ; his landlady was civil and obliging, and that was all he required. At first she had seemed inclined to be interested in him—she had condoled with him freely, more freely than he liked, upon the solitary life he was leading. She volunteered all sorts of information concerning her neighbours, her lodgers, and her own domestic affairs in particular, and even went so far as to invite him down-stairs to have a “bit of supper, and a chat with my Robert, Sir, as he’s a sensible man to talk to as ever was, and belongs to the League—I don’t mean that nasty Reform League, which I think is all a sham, from that Beales at the head, to the dirty roughs at the tail ; but the Temperance League, Sir ; and he have even spoke on the platform with Mr. George Cruikshanks in the chair. Now do come down, Sir, you’ll be moped to death up here ; and I’m sure a chat with my Robert would cheer you up.”

But Paul Wynter did not want to be “cheered up” by the eloquent Robert, and politely declined the kindly invitations as often as they were given, till at last they ceased altogether. He either smiled or turned a deaf ear to her gossiping communications, and she soon ceased to waste her words upon one who was evidently so little interested. One morning, as he was lingering over a copy of the *Medical Gazette*, and getting slowly through his breakfast, she burst unceremoniously into the room.

“Oh ! Sir, I hope you’ll excuse me, but would you kindly step up for a minute—he’s getting worse and worse !”

“He !—who ?” exclaimed Paul Wynter, rising quickly.

“Our three pair back, Sir—I’ve told you all about him over and over again—he’ve been bedridden in this very house going on three years, and this morning I don’t think he’s right in his head, for he’s going on awful, and I’ve sent for the parish doctor, and a straight waistcoat ; but the Lord knows when he’ll be here, so if you would kindly step up—not making me answerable,” she added, with sudden thoughtfulness, laying a detaining grasp upon him.

He broke away from her with an impatient “Pshaw !” and rapidly mounted the stairs.

The sun streamed fierce and hot through the open window of the "three pair back," and lighted up the grey gaunt figure of an old man who was seated bolt upright in a low truckle-bed, that stood in the corner of the room; his thin white hair clung to his hollow temples, and his long beard hung tangled and matted almost to his waist. He was looking out far beyond the confines of that narrow room, back into the years that were gone, and the stirring scenes and actions of his life were reproduced upon his brain in a series of confused but vivid pictures. He was an old soldier, and in his fancy is fighting his battles over again. Then he smote the air nervously with his hands, his brow was contracted, his lips compressed, and his breath came and went in short, laboured gasps.

"He is quiet now," whispered the landlady; "but he have been going on awful." Even as she spoke he raved out with a sudden flash of fire.

"The blackguards run!—right! quick march!" He gathered himself up in the bed, as though about to spring from it; but, quick as thought, one of Paul Wynter's soft, firm hands was upon his breast, the other upon his brow. The old man turned his eyes upon him with a frightened look, all the fire died out of them, and the tall gaunt figure seemed to shrink and shrivel, every nerve and sinew, into a weak, feeble old man, half the size of the battered old soldier. "Margaret," he muttered, in a low, indistinct voice, "don't let them take me away."

"No grandfather, they sha'n't," and the small diminutive figure of a girl, with elfin locks and great dark eyes, rose up at the head of the bed. The old man's bony fingers clutched at the girl's outstretched hand as though he had faith in its frail protection. In another moment his eyes were closed and he breathed peacefully.

Paul Wynter saw at a glance that no human power could pour health and vigour into the old man's veins—nature was worn out, and he was dying of old age. His landlady spoke to the child coaxingly.

"Maggy, dear, tell the doctor how long your grandfather has been ill, or else he can't do him no good, you know."

"Grandfather isn't ill," replied the girl, with sullen anger;

"and he doesn't want no doctor at all—doctoring won't do him no good."

"I think you are right, my child," replied Paul, laying his hand kindly upon her shoulder, "I do not think I can do him any good ; but at least you can tell me how long he has been like this."

"Like what?" she answered, casting an inquiring glance into his face.

"Subject to those fits of wandering in his mind."

"Do you mean talking wild about battles and all that? Oh! he's always been so off and on ; his head is bad sometimes, and he's afraid of being took to the 'sylum ; but I've promised him he sh'an't go ;" and as she spoke the young thing caressed the old man's hand, and looked down upon him with a protecting air, that might have raised a smile if it had not been so full of melancholy suggestions. Was that young weird-looking thing the only companion and protector of the broken-down soldier? Had all the strength of his manhood dwindled away till he had nothing but that frail reed to rest upon? Better to have died in the roar of battle, with the din of war and boom of cannon thundering in his ears, than linger through a long life and die at last like this? It was in truth a pitiable sight. Paul Wynter glanced round the wretched apartment. Except for the truckle-bed on which the dying soldier lay, a few rush chairs, a dilapidated table, and what seemed to be a bundle of rags in one corner of the room, it was bare of furniture ; the mantelpiece was decorated with odds and ends of old china, an old tattered pensioner's coat hung behind the door, and a teapot with a broken spout was simmering on the hob. The whole scene was desolate enough. Once more he looked down on the old man's face. He was still lying with closed eyes, breathing peacefully like a tired child falling asleep, and then his eyes rested on the girl.

"Who takes care of him?" Paul inquired.

"I do—ever since he haven't took care of me," she answered.

"What?" exclaimed Paul, "through all these paroxysms I hear of?"

"I ain't afraid. Grandfather wouldn't hurt me," said the girl with a sort of contempt at the idea.

"Lord ha' mercy," exclaimed Mrs. Lloyd, "to think of my having a madman in the house and never knowing it."

"He's not mad," answered the girl turning upon her fiercely; "and you wouldn't ha' knowed nothing about it now, if you hadn't ha' come spying and found it out—you've no business here at all, I didn't ask you to come—and you'll want to send him to the 'sylum, he said you would. Oh! what shall I do? what shall I do? Don't let them take him away, Sir, please don't," she clutched Paul by the sleeve and looked appealingly in his face.

"No," he answered soothingly, moved by her distress, "I promise you no one shall take him away." She thanked him with a grateful look, as though her mind were relieved from a heavy load, and spoke in a low changed voice, with all its sharpness gone.

"He knew his head was wrong sometimes, and he was afraid they'd take him away to the place where the people was always mad; and he used to cry so, he knew when it was coming on, and beg me not to tell, not to leave him. I was frightened sometimes, though, but I never said a word, never."

Paul Wynter looked with deep interest on the child so young, and yet so brave! He fancied he could read the secret history of two lonely lives. The old man, weakened with age and affliction, feeling the subtle spirit of madness creeping through his veins, shrinking from it, but with no hope of escaping, clinging to this child, crying to her to save him from that horror of horrors, a lunatic asylum; a dread of *that* seemed vivid and strong in his worn-out brain; and she, poor child, had borne his incoherent murmurings or wilder ravings and "never said a word," he could fancy her creeping into a corner, "frightened sometimes," watching and waiting for the paroxysms to pass away. Paul Wynter upbraided himself because he had been living beneath the same roof and allowed this heavy burthen to rest upon such helpless shoulders. He fancied he ought to have discovered the pitiable case and given his help before. "If I had looked round me," he thought, "I should have found my work; but I have folded my hands and waited for it to come." He was displeased with Mrs. Lloyd for not having called his attention in plain words to the sad plight of her

poorer lodgers. She had, no doubt, as she said, told him all about it; but, at the same time, had interlarded her tale with so much gossiping jargon, that the real thread of it had been lost." He dismissed her from the room, saying that he would remain and watch the case until the doctor she had sent for arrived.

He saw at the first glance that the old man was as near death as it was possible for the living to be. As he did not think he could struggle on through many hours, he resolved that the child who had so bravely faced the terrors of life, should not be left alone to face the shadow of death. He called her to him, and said gently,—

"I have told you that no one shall take your grandfather away; but I do not think you will be able to keep him here, Margaret."

There was an unusual sweetness in his tone as the name fell lingeringly from his lips, as though it were loth to leave them. He looked kindly upon the desolate young face—perhaps his thoughts flew to that other Margaret, and he wondered if her spirit of charity could reach down to this forlorn one. The girl crouched down by the bedside, seeming to comprehend that some solemn crisis was at hand; and she kept her great dark eyes fixed in silent wonder on the old man's face. Occasionally his lips trembled, and there was a strong muscular movement of the limbs, but he never spoke. Paul Wynter thought he would never speak again. Suddenly his eyes flew wide open, with a last convulsive struggle he gathered his energies together, and sprang up in the bed, crying out,—

"Hounds! I never skulked before an enemy; but I won't—I won't be hunted down! Peggie, hide me! hide me!"

These were the last words he spoke. The light of terror flashed out from his eyes, and left them dim and dark. The reign of terror was over. The old soldier's last battle was fought—he was dead!

Paul Wynter took the child by the hand and led her from the room, first calling the woman of the house to render the last office to the dead. Upon the stairs, ascending slowly, with a weary look upon his face, they encountered Mr. Taylor, the parish surgeon. He recoiled a step

when Paul Wynter told him he was too late—so far as this world was concerned, all was over with the old man.

"I am sorry for it," he answered; "but I cannot help it, I could not possibly be here before." He looked so grieved, that Paul Wynter hastened to ease his mind.

"You could have done no good," he said; "he has died of combined diseases, that neither you nor I could cure—poverty and old age."

Mr. Taylor's face brightened.

"I am glad, at least," he said, "that he has not suffered from any neglect of mine. I am afraid I must give up this parish work, it is more than I can conscientiously do. You would hardly believe it, but I have more than three hundred patients on my books, and out of these there are one hundred and ten to be visited at their own homes."

"I wish you would allow me to assist you!" exclaimed Paul; "I am a qualified surgeon, and visiting the poor is a work I should enjoy above all others just now."

"You are very kind, but I am not allowed an assistant; indeed, the salary I myself receive is so small, I cannot live upon it."

"Oh! we will make it a joint concern," replied Paul Wynter smiling; "I will give advice gratis, and you shall supply the medicines."

They talked the matter over, and before they parted, it was arranged that Mr. Taylor should call the following morning, and Paul Wynter should accompany him on his rounds and see the kind of work and people a parish surgeon had to encounter. Meanwhile, the occurrence that had brought them together was not forgotten. Paul Wynter inquired if Mr. Taylor had authority to arrange for the burial of the old soldier, as there seemed to be no one to take any steps in the affair—he and the girl had appeared to live their lives entirely alone, and she was too young to take thought on the matter. Mr. Taylor shook his head.

"My business lies with the living, not with the dead. In the case of the very poor, of course the parish finds the grave; but I should advise you to leave the matter in the hands of your landlady, she will understand how to arrange it much better than you could do."

This was the first day of events that had stirred Paul

Wynter's quiet life. He had bespoken Mrs. Lloyd's kindness for lonely little Margaret, and she seemed inclined to befriend her in a kind, motherly way. Towards the dusk of the evening, as he sat thinking on many things which he had often vowed to forget, and as often took pleasure, though a somewhat melancholy one, in remembering, his door opened slowly and Margaret glided into the room, looking flushed and angry.

"Oh! Sir," she exclaimed, "please come up-stairs; they are going to take him away now, and I don't want him to go, but they put me out of the room—they won't mind a word I say."

He asked her to explain herself more fully, and then learned that he was going to be taken to the workhouse, for the purpose of being buried in a pauper's grave. It was against this the child rebelled.

"I know grandfather wouldn't like it, Sir," she added, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"But he cannot feel it," said Paul gravely; "his spirit has gone to a better world, and it is no matter where his dust is laid."

"It does matter," she sobbed out, "and though he don't feel it, he may know all about it; and I—I should never be happy again if I thought grandfather wasn't comfortable in his grave."

"But, my dear child," he said, coming to a plain common-sense view of the point in question, "it would take a great deal of money, I daresay much more than you have got, to provide a funeral for your poor grandfather; and I daresay Mrs. Lloyd is doing all for the best—she understands these things better than we do."

"I hate her!—she said he was mad!" exclaimed the girl fiercely; "but I know all about money—we can sell the furniture"—Paul Wynter could hardly help smiling, as he remembered how scantily the word "furniture" was represented—"and there's my best frock and my new shoes," she added eagerly, "and the pension is due to-morrow."

Paul looked on the child's pleading face and tearful eyes, and could not shut his heart against her. He remembered with what unconscious bravery she had clung to the dead

man through a life that must have had many terrors for one so young, and even in death her loving care followed him—"He must be comfortable in his grave." He felt it was a sweet and sacred feeling that prompted the child's prayer; young as she was, she seemed to shrink with horror from the idea of a pauper's grave.

During all his after-experiences among the poor he found the same deep feeling prevail. They were resigned to bear the ills of poverty, disease, cold, and hunger, they would give up their living to the mercy of the parish officers, but not their dead; they would sell their last rag, beg, starve, as nearly as human nature can, but their dead must be buried decently.

The child clung so earnestly to her pious wish, that Paul Wynter ceased to use any argument against it; besides, he had a sort of feeling in his own breast that the bones of a brave old soldier ought not to be shovelled away, without sanctity or respect, with as little heed as the dust that covered him. He took Margaret by the hand, and went with her up-stairs, promising to do his best to make some satisfactory arrangement for her grandfather's funeral. He dismissed the men who had brought a shell for the purpose of taking the body away, and made himself responsible for any expense that might be incurred. When the day for the burial came, he and Margaret were the sole mourners—the lonely child and the lonely man. Meanwhile he had learned all that was to be learned of her history. Her name was Griffith, she was an orphan, and her grandfather was the only friend she had in the world. He inquired whether she remembered her parents, and if she was sure she had no relations living.

"Yes," she said, "she was quite sure of that; her father was killed by an accident, and she remembered her mother quite well."

"Has she been long dead?" he asked.

Margaret frowned, looked silently into the fire for a moment; then a strangely vindictive expression lighted up her face as she answered,—

"Yes, a long time—she died on the mill," adding eagerly, "but she did nothing wrong; she was sent there for begging. Grandfather told me all about it. He was ill of

the fever and we had no food, no clothes, nor no money, and it was all frost and snow ; so mother went out to see if she could get something, if anybody would help us ; and a rich gentleman, that goes prowling about, harrying poor folks to death, pounced upon her, took her before the magistrates, who sent her to prison for seven days, but she died before they was over. When I grow up I mean to punish that man. I know his name."

As she spoke, her eyes, which were strangely beautiful, glowed like living coals. She looked as though she would be capable of watching, waiting, and keeping her word. Paul Wynter knew quite well to whom she alluded ; he had often heard of that particular gentleman's vigorous onslaughts upon these unfortunates who had not courage to starve, and yet were bold enough to beg ; but he had never seen the effect of such noble prowess until now that he looked upon the little, lonely Margaret.





CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR.

“A wise physician, skill’d our wounds to heal,
Is more than armies to the public weal.”



GRADUAL change crept over Paul Wynter's monotonous life. The work he had so long waited for had come at last ; certainly it was not remunerative, nor of a character that would have been attractive to many men, but it suited him. His occupation lay among the very poor, who were huddled together by thousands in the lanes, courts, and alleys of Pentonville, with the outlying district of Clerkenwell stretching beyond it ; and for the present he was content to have his labours so limited, and to give them gratis. No man can live upon air, and he was no exception to the rule. His means, which he had husbanded well, sufficed for his present needs, and for a world of charity besides. His small capital was dwindling gradually away, melting beneath the influence of his warm heart and liberal hand. Already he could see to the end of it, when it was exhausted ! Well, he would have no fears for the future, and consoled himself with the old adage, “Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.” His faith in providence had been cruelly shaken, still he had a sort of indistinct hazy belief that something would turn up, and God would provide.

Meanwhile he had the satisfaction of lightening the labours of Mr. Taylor, the parish surgeon, whose strength

was sorely overtaxed ; for he was a conscientious man, and sincerely wished to do his duty ; but though he stretched his ability to the utmost, that was impossible ; he could never have stemmed the tide of disease and sickness and epidemic alone. But for the energetic watchful care of Paul Wynter, many must have perished from the want of that help which Mr. Taylor could not himself have given them.

Paul Wynter went about his work with an unflagging spirit. He was never weary ; at all times, no matter if it were wet or dry, day or night, he obeyed cheerfully the summons to the sick or suffering. He often went to his bed tired out with the overwhelming labour of the day, and was awakened from his first sleep by the tinkling of his night-bell, which had been so long silent ; but it was eloquent enough now, and called him to the haunts of poverty and pain. He learned to love the sound of it, as he had once learned to love sweeter music. One point of the ambition of his life was gained, he was of use to the poor—of what great use, and how much he was their benefactor, they best could tell. He had not buried the one talent God had given him, but used it nobly, and with it coined the gratitude of many hearts. His daily experience made him acquainted with some strange phases of existence. He knew that the poor abounded in the great overgrown city of London ; he had heard of it, read of it, had seen want and poverty go shivering past him in the public streets ; but he had never lived with it, and been a part of it, as he was now, for his eyes looked on nothing else. He often looked back, and bitterly regretted the loss of the wealth which had been as nothing to him then, but would now have been so much. With a little gold he could have relieved so much leaden-eyed misery ; as it was, he did all he could, and grieved he could do so little.

Oftentimes he was sent for to prescribe medicines, when hunger was the disease, and food the only remedy, if indeed the patient had not already gone past all remedy. Fever-stricken men and women, young skeleton-like children, these were the people he visited ; empty grates and crumbless cupboards often were the sights he saw. It pained him to witness these things when poverty alone was the leveller ;

but it pained him more when vice had help to perfect the work. Sometimes he felt he was living in a city of ruins, not of ruined stones and palaces, but ruined lives. Occasionally, indeed, during his professional peregrinations, he came across some pathetic and pleasant picture of humble life.

One day about noon he was sent for to visit a sick child. He had a weakness for children, a kind of loving pity perhaps for their helplessness, and whenever he went among them, he generally carried some harmless sweet or attractive little toy in his pocket, wherewith to propitiate the un-reasoning things.

He rose up immediately he received the summons, put a fluffy squeaking rabbit in his pocket, and went on his way. After threading sundry narrow streets, and losing himself more than once, he found the house he was in search of. It was a small coal-shed, that did a little business in the green-grocery line, situated at the corner of a decent alley. He was received, on entering, by a stout, elderly woman, with a large, motherly face, that bore the traces of tears, which had washed a clean pathway down her grimy cheeks. She stopped in her employment of weighing out coals, took up the corner of her coarse apron, and commenced rubbing her eyes, curtsying as she said,—

“It’s my little gal as is ill, Sir ; she’s been a-frettin’ and a-crying’ till I’m a’most worrited to death.”

“Where is she?—I will see what I can do for her,” said Paul Wynter ; and as he stepped forward, the woman half opened a little glass door that led into her parlour, saying in a warning whisper,—

“Please to go in quiet, Sir ; and don’t say you’re a doctor, for she’s that artful, she’ll begin again, as physic’s a thing I cannot get her to take. My master’s with her now ; she will have him in to amuse her, which is hard on me, Sir, having coals to weigh up, and not being strong in my back.”

Paul Wynter obeyed her caution, and on entering the room softly, beheld a child about three years old seated upon a sofa bedstead, with a headless doll in her lap, the counterpane being strewed with broken playthings. Clutched in her tiny hand were a few birch twigs, bound together to

represent a rod ; on a stool beside her sat the old coal-man, with a fool's-cap upon his head, and an A B C book in his hand. The child looked ill and fretful, and though half-amused, was whimpering still. The old man winked vigorously at Paul Wynter, and evidently wishing to prepare the infant autocrat for the appearance of a stranger, said,—

“Daddy's a very naughty boy, daddy is, he don't know his A B C, and he must go in the corner for a dunce. Baby won't beat him this time, and he'll be a good boy, and cut out some tables and chairs ; and the gentleman shall come and conjure an orange out of daddy's pocket.”

Here a series of emphatic winks and side nods from the old man invited Paul Wynter to come forward and make himself known to the young invalid, and he did so, announcing his presence in the most agreeable way he could, adapting himself to the circumstances round him, saying,—

“No, I cannot conjure an orange out of daddy's pocket, but I can conjure something out of my own.”

He sent his hands on a searching expedition into all his pockets, and after many pretended surprises and disappointments, etc., he at last produced the rabbit, which surprising animal, after a series of metallic squeaks, was wound up, and went through the usual performance, ringing its bells, and running round the room on invisible wheels, till the sick child shrieked with delight. Having ingratiated himself so far in its favour, Paul Wynter proceeded to business, and having quickly ascertained the ailment of the child, which was nothing serious, promised it should soon be running about again as merry as ever. The old man resumed his office of nurse and playmate with glistening eyes ; and the mother burst into tears.

“Thank God, Sir. Then you think she'll get all right again ? I'm that fond on her, Sir, that, if I was to lose her, I think I should break my heart, that I do.”

“There is no fear of that just now,” said Paul, cheerfully. “I see you are over-anxious ; but I suppose she is your only child.”

“Lor' bless you, Sir, she ain't mine at all ; though it's all the same to me, I'm as fond on her as if she was, for I've had her ever since she was six weeks old, and she've been

always ailing—nights and nights I've sat up cryin' my eyes out, through thinkin' I shouldn't rear her."

"Indeed," replied Paul, "a young child is a very anxious charge—her friends must be deeply grateful to you for all your care."

"She ain't got no friends, Sir; she's a love child, and her mother went off into a galloping consumption, and they wanted to send her to the parish, poor little cretur', but I said, 'No, not while I've got a crust in the cupboard, or hands that can work to earn one; and my master says the same, so that's how it is, Sir; and though times are hard now and then, I don't believe we shall ever miss little Amy's bread."

"No, rest assured you never will," replied Paul, his face beaming with the pleasure he always felt when contemplating a good work. He was not much given to the use of Scriptural phrases, but he remembered that "whosoever giveth a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in Christ's name, shall in no wise lose his reward."

Paul Wynter leaned upon the counter, listening rather than talking; while she, poor soul, glad of a sympathising listener, poured her domestic troubles wholesale into his ear. She could not have told them to any man who was better calculated to comfort her. Presently, as he was about to depart, she said, with some little embarrassment, emptying the scanty contents of the till upon the counter,—

"But about the physic, please, Sir—half-a-crown was Mr. Smithson's fee, leeches when wanted, and everything included."

"Oh!" he answered, gravely, "but my fee's larger than that."

"I'm very sorry, Sir," she answered, with an apologetic blush; "but being market morning, we're a little short—one and eleven is all we've got in the house; but if you'll please take that, I'll make it up before night." She gathered the small silver coins and halfpence together in a little heap, and held them towards him. He smiled, and put back her hand, as she added: "Maybe I oughtn't to have sent for you, Sir, not having the means to pay, but I couldn't abide parish doctors; they don't care whether poor folks lives or dies, 'specially little ones; and I have heerd tell as

sometimes they give 'em stuff to make 'em go off quietly."

"You are very hard upon the parish doctors;" he said, "and unjust as well; the gentleman who now attends the poor is a friend of mine, and a most kind and conscientious man—indeed, I sometimes relieve him of a portion of his work."

"No offence to him or you, Sir, but I couldn't abide the thought on it; the very physic's sweeter when we pay for it, and I believe it does more good. I've heerd of parish blisters as wouldn't rise, and leeches as wouldn't take, so if you please take that one and eleven, Sir, which is all I've got at present, I'll send the rest before the evening; and if you make haste and get Amy well, I sha'n't mind payin' more'n the half-crown."

"No," said Paul, decidedly rejecting the proffered payment, "I could not take your money, Mrs. Simmons; it would burn my hands and lie heavy on my conscience. When Amy is well, she and I will settle the account between us. For the future, if you take care of her when she is well, I will be her guardian when she is sick; that shall be a compact between us. I will give her some medicine at once, and look in and see her again this evening."

If he had been starving, he could not have touched a penny of that woman's scanty stock. He was struck by the sublime charity of the kindly pair, for sublime it really was. They were poor, hardworking, and with age creeping rapidly over them, yet they were content to rob themselves of daily comfort and nights of rest, and devote themselves to the care of this forlorn, fractious child—love-child, so cruelly mis-called. Such pleasant glimpses of the bright sides of human nature cheered his spirit, and gave him courage to go on. His life was now by no means an uneventful one, though the events were not always of the most agreeable kind. He found some traces of goodness, some gleams of honour, even among the most depraved. Sometimes he found a woman, the most degraded and lost, sharing her crust and pallet of straw with another, whom she had found roaming the streets hungry and homeless, and even more wretched than herself. He had many opportunities of observing the charity they extended to each other, and the

care which they lavished on their aged and their sick. Warm hearts were beating, and kindly acts abounding, where modesty was in ruins, and virtue only a name. The sublime charity some of these outcast women showed to each other might have taught a lesson to some of their more virtuous sisters, who have never been tried, never tempted, and therefore have never fallen.

"God judges these things differently from men!" he often thought. "Though lost and degraded here, they will be at last safely folded in heaven."

One evening late, he was sent for to attend a serious case in a densely populated neighbourhood, occupied chiefly by depraved men and women of the lowest order. As he was returning home, long past midnight, two men glided out of a darkened doorway, and followed him with stealthy steps till he had reached an utterly desolated spot, and then they threw themselves upon him, and in a second he was upon the ground—their hands were upon his throat, he could not cry out, he could scarcely breathe. He had nothing valuable about him except his watch; it had once been his mother's, and he struggled to retain it, though he knew he was struggling for his life as well. The little strength he had was rapidly departing, and he was almost overpowered.

Meanwhile, not a word was spoken, not a sound was heard, except what seemed to him the shuffling of a hundred feet around his head. Suddenly a fury, as it seemed, in the shape of a woman, bore down upon them, tore the ruffians from his throat with the strength and fierceness of a tiger, and with a volley of unwomanly oaths exclaimed,—

"Let him alone; it's our little doctor! You ought to ha' know'd him! If you've hurt him, I'll limb you all round."

Paul heard low muttered words pass from mouth to mouth, felt himself lifted up very tenderly, but he remembered no more then, nor for some days to come. About four o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Lloyd heard a loud ringing at the house bell, and on descending to answer it, she found him lying insensible on the steps. The inmates of her house were soon roused, and he was carried into the house, and laid upon his bed, while the conclave of women surrounded

him, and were loud in their expressions of wonder as to the why and the wherefore of his sad plight. They were all anxious to do something for him ; but, as usual, where there is no guiding spirit, but only a confusion of wills, their boisterous compassions evaporated in words. They gathered round him, crooning out their compassion, and interspersing their lamentations with running comments upon the dangers of the public streets, and the shortcomings of the police ; but he lay there still and unconscious of the rude invasion these sympathising gossips had made upon the sanctity of his humble and solitary home.

Meanwhile, little Margaret, who had seen him carried into his room, with instinctive thoughtfulness ran off for Mr. Taylor, who was speedily on the spot. He pronounced Paul Wynter to be suffering from concussion of the brain. He dismissed all the women from the room, with the exception of Mrs. Lloyd, whom he permitted to wait upon him, while he performed with his own hands the offices both of nurse and doctor.

Having done all that the skill or power of man could do, he gave his parting directions to Mrs. Lloyd.

"Mr. Wynter needs perfect quiet and careful watching," he said ; "there is nothing seriously wrong with him, and I hope, between us, we may soon get him round—do you know how this unfortunate affair occurred ?"

"No more than you do, Sir ; he ain't been robbed, that's certain, for there's his watch, his purse, and even his pocket-hankercher all safe, but not sound, for the glass is broke. He's had a tussle with somebody, for his clothes is all tore, and ____"

"Well, never mind," interrupted Mr. Taylor, "all we have got to do is to set him up again. I leave him with perfect confidence in your hands ; you will not be alarmed if he should wander a little in his mind."

"Indeed, Sir, I should," exclaimed Mrs. Lloyd in a fright. "I don't mind his wandering anywhere else, provided it isn't in his mind. I can manage a man in his natural state, but when he takes to wandering, one never knows where it will end."

Little Margaret, who had remained unnoticed in the room, now reminded them of her presence, saying,—

"I ain't afraid, and I'm a good hand at watching. I've often kept awake all night when grandfather was alive, and off his head a little."

Mr. Taylor recognised the child at once. He had often noticed, during his occasional attendance on the old soldier, what a preternaturally thoughtful child it was, and what a quiet, attentive little nurse. Glancing from one to the other, he felt it would be wiser to leave Paul Wynter in charge of the earnest, anxious-looking child, than in that of the large, boisterous, though well-meaning Mrs. Lloyd, who was one of those loud-patterned women whose quietest movement is suggestive of noise and commotion. She, on her part, seemed highly gratified by Margaret's proposal, and graciously said,—

"Well, I do like to see sparks of gratitude, and I must say Maggy's blazing with 'em, and so she ought to be, for Mr. Wynter's been that kind to her as never was. Of course, Sir, I'll do all as far as one Christian can for another, but having a young family, I can't say as that will be much in regard to Mr. Wynter."

"I shall look in upon him pretty often myself," said Mr. Taylor; "meanwhile I daresay little Margaret here will be able, as I am sure she is willing, to do anything that is necessary for Mr. Wynter."

The girl's face brightened at the idea of being trusted in a matter of so much importance, and Mrs. Lloyd seemed rather glad to avoid any responsibility as far as her lodger was concerned, and left the room as soon as she found a decent opportunity of doing so. Margaret looked after her, and as the door closed upon her, said with a gesture of contempt,—

"She'd never ha' done to watch Mr. Wynter, for as soon as she sits down she goes to sleep and snores horribly."

So it fell out that Margaret Griffith was installed as Paul Wynter's nurse. Truly he had cast his bread upon the water and it had returned to him before many days; for never was a man tended with greater watchfulness and loving care. Mr. Taylor spent as much time as he possibly could with his unconscious friend and patient.

For two or three days Paul Wynter remained in an un-

conscious state. Sometimes he opened his eyes, but he seemed neither to heed nor to see anything that was passing round him. When he spoke, there was no coherence in his words.

On the morning of the third day, after a night of perfect rest, he opened his eyes and saw the bright sunlight streaming in through the window. For a second, he fancied he had passed an ordinary night, and it was time to get up. He felt no pain, only a strange feeling of peace and tranquility. He raised one hand to his head, which was still enveloped in bandages, and then knew that something was wrong with him. His other hand was lying on the counterpane near the edge of the bed. Margaret's cheek was resting on it, and it was wet with her tears.

"Margaret," he said, in his low sweet voice; and she looked up with a radiant face, though her eyes were full of tears, "what has been the matter? Have I been ill?"

She told him in a few words all that had happened to him as far as she knew.

"Ah! I remember now," he said, as the facts dawned slowly on his mind. After a momentary pause, during which he gathered together his scattered thoughts, he again addressed the child, saying, "Why are you crying, Margaret? I am better now. I shall soon be quite well again."

"Oh! it is not that," she answered—"I am not crying sorry tears; but you have been thinking of me all the while you have been ill."

"How, child, thinking of you?" he said languidly.

"You have been saying such beautiful things," she added, drooping her face once more upon his hand. "You thought I was a grand rich lady—and oh! I wish I was, I wish I was! You should never work, never be tired, never be sorry any more."

A strange, far-away smile broke over his face, filling his eyes with light. His thoughts flew off to that other Margaret. He had tried to thrust her out from his real working life, but she had come to him, her sweet sympathetic spirit had been with him in his dreams, his delirium, and his pain. Although he had been unconscious of the blessing, he had seen her with his spirit's eyes, had spoken

her name with his lips of clay, and the sound of it had fallen upon the ears of this unconscious child, her namesake.

“Poor little Margaret,” he said, laying his hands upon the dark unkempt locks of the tender child, “leave me a little while. I should like to be quiet and alone.”





CHAPTER VII.

BROOKLANDS.

“The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand,
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
O'er all the pleasant land.”



FINE old property is Brooklands, and embracing some thousand acres of well-cultivated, richly-wooded land, parcelled out and let to thriving tenants, many of whom, as well as their fathers before them, had been born upon the spot, and had learned to love the soil on which they laboured and lived. As they increased in wealth and importance, they enriched the land, extended their stock, added to or improved the homestead, keeping all in perfect order and repair, from their own door-stone to the labourer's cottages—even down to the cattle-sheds and pig-sties. No broken fences, ragged hedges or filthy ditches, are seen on the Brooklands estate. The landlord is on the best possible terms with his tenants; they have a mutual interest in each other, and work together for mutual advantage. He is always ready to consider their views, and co-operate with them in their plans for improving and increasing the value of their leasehold possessions. Some short-sighted agriculturists in the neighbourhood would expatiate on the folly of making an outlay on another man's property; but Mr. Brookland's tenants knew that where they made one stroke for their landlord's good, they made

fifty for their own. The benefit to him was small and distant, to themselves it was great and immediate, not only in the present, but for the future, for generations to come, for their children, and their children's children after them. These things considered, it is no wonder that the Manor of Brooklands is celebrated in the country. Even strangers passing through the place are struck by the pleasant homesteads and the general well-to-do look of the people and the land they live on. It is a magnificent estate, this wide domain of Brooklands. You might wander for miles through green winding lanes, wooded valleys and rude heathery plains, with little villages, consisting perhaps of a dozen cottages, nestling in odd nooks and corners; over ploughed fields or grassy meadows, through woods of lofty elms, or gloomy fir-trees, and every foot of ground you trod upon calls Mr. Brookland master. Wherever you turn, if you choose to enter into conversation with the villagers, they will regale you with quaint legends or some sweet romance of the Brooklands of the olden times; for are there not always some thrilling histories clinging to those ancient houses; whose sons and daughters have for centuries owned the soil? The house, commonly called Brookland Hall, stands in a deep hollow at the end of a beautifully-wooded valley, and is surrounded by a wide moat, through which a sparkling stream glides gracefully close up to the very walls of the edifice, which seems to be rising out of an islet. So completely is the mansion hidden from sight by the grave majestic chestnut-trees with which it is embosomed, that it can scarcely be seen until you are within a few hundred yards of it. It is one of those remarkable buildings so seldom seen now-a-days, for those ancient homes and halls of England are being rapidly swept away from the face of this fair land, giving place to others, perhaps larger and loftier, with grand corridors and stately chambers, more regular and commodious, but less picturesque and with no associations, no scent of the old days lingering on the threshold or clinging to the roof. Having been erected during several periods, ranging from the time of the third Edward to that of the first James, the house presents rather a heterogeneous mass, combining defensive provisions with the usual domestic arrangements. Crenellated walls,

overhanging roofs, lofty gables, and fanciful chimneys meet the eye at every turn. On the other side of the moat is one of those noble parks for which England is so justly celebrated, and which, indeed, can be seen in no other part of the world. The sward is of the greenest and most velvety kind. Trees of most venerable growth are massed about in large clumps, affording shelter to the deer, and adding wonderfully to the beauty of the landscape. Those grand old trees, the noble beech and solemn dark elms, have outlived generations of men, and looked down upon the birth of a hundred Brooklands, and waved their boughs above them as they were carried to their graves.

There is something sublimely grand about those fine old places, where Nature has kept her ground and developed her glories, while generations of men, and the works of their hands, have crumbled into dust ! A beautiful lake, supplied by the stream which runs through the moat, occupies several acres of land, and not only increases the charm, but adds considerably to the value of the property and the amusement of its possessors. It is the favourite resort of Margaret Brookland when she is at home in the bright summer time ; scarcely a day passes that does not find her there, either rowing in her light scallop shell of a boat, or wandering along its banks, or seated by her father's side, reading to him while he seeks to entrap the "tawny-finned fish." Looking round upon this cool, pleasant home, clothed in sweet spring glories, with bursting buds and delicate fair blossoms trembling from a thousand boughs, you would be inclined to wonder how the owner could have left such a lovely spot to wander in foreign lands in search of beauty, or of novelty and grandeur, rather ; for picturesque beauty, with its many-tinted colours, and broken lights and shadows, can be found in few places in such perfection as in England. Indeed, however far we may wander abroad in search of new pleasures or excitements, we always return back to the old land with renewed appreciation of its many beauties ; the trees seem greener, the air fresher, and even the sun less burning and more genial than we have found elsewhere.

For the last month or two, Brooklands had looked very lonely and desolate ; the quaint old house, with its closed windows, surrounded by the silent waters and mysteriously

murmuring trees, seemed to be brooding sulkily over its undeserved desertion. But suddenly it began to wake up, and put on its brightest look ; shutters were unbarred, windows opened, and pleasant faces might be seen flitting from room to room, busily engaged in making preparations for the owner's return. The gardeners were at work, trimming and clearing, cutting and coaxing, that the sweetest flowers might be in bloom, and everything arranged in the most artistic and perfect way to meet their young lady's eye. Villagers came trooping up to make inquiries and to learn the latest news. Everything animate and inanimate seemed to wear a bright expectant look, as though the winds had rushed forward in advance of the travellers, and whispered "They are coming" to the woods and valleys, and even to the silent streams that now danced and sparkled in the sunlight. The labourers left their work many times during the day, and rushed to the hedge-side, eager to catch the first glimpse of the carriage, and bear the news to Brooklands, for thither Margaret and her father were hastening fast.

Soon after they left the Splügen Hôtel, she began to tire of travelling, she found it dull and uninteresting. Even the charming cities of Milan, Florence, and Turin, excited only a passing enthusiasm. She got tired of going over cathedrals, churches, picture-galleries, and art-museums. They confused her, she said—the whole got so jumbled together in her mind, that she could recall nothing distinctly. In fact, she was suffering from a severe attack of home-sickness.

"I am tired of these strange places and strange people, papa," she said wearily ; "it was all very well at first, but now the novelty has worn off, and I long to get back to Brooklands. Do you think we could manage to be home before the apple blossoms have fallen, and while the laburnums are still in bloom ?"

"Why, what a weathercock you are !" replied her father ; "just now you were all anxiety to push on to Paris, to furbish up your wardrobe, and carry back the world of fashion to Brooklands."

"Well, and I am anxious to get on to Paris still, only I do not want to stay there, except perhaps for a day or two, just time enough to look about me and buy two or three

little things that I want to take home as presents. I must find something of the very latest fashion for Mrs. Creamly, or I shall be smothered with mild reproaches."

"Poor woman!—I have a great regard for Mrs. Creamly, Maggie—I always sympathise with people who have seen better days."

"So do I; but I sympathise much more with people who make the best of the present. I see no use in making an everlasting moan over the better days that have passed away with one's great-grandfather; especially when they are never likely to return."

"How can you tell that?"

"At any rate, talking will never bring them back; and I am sure that is all she is likely to do towards it."

"You are very hard on Mrs. Creamly."

"Am I? and yet I am very fond of her in a sort of way."

"In an odd sort of way," said Mr. Brookland. "She is a great favourite of mine. I consider her a most estimable person; she has her peculiarities, certainly, but they do not interfere with you."

"Yes, they do, they give me a moral fit of indigestion," said Margaret. "The little-mindedness and petty faults of people I like vex and worry me in a way that only small things can. I am sure I should like them better if their faults were greater and their meanness less."

"You generally look on the bright side of everything," said Mr. Brookland, "except when poor Mrs. Creamly is concerned, then you always see the darker side of human nature."

"Because that is the side that turns uppermost, and I cannot help seeing it."

"But you think nothing and take no account of the kind heart that lies beneath her harmless follies."

"Oh, yes I do, and I am going to show my appreciation of it, by presenting her with the prettiest and most fashionable French bonnet I can find. Most people can understand that sort of appreciation."

"I cannot, and I candidly confess ——"

"And I candidly confess that you are a dear old-fashioned darling," interrupted Margaret, "and I am half jealous of

Mrs. Creamly. It is a fortunate thing for me that there is a Mr. Creamly living in a state of unfluctuating health, or I should have fearful visions of the 'Brookland Arms' with quarterings of Creamly."

They were driving along one of those long dusty roads that abound in Northern Italy, with miles of mulberry trees stretching on either side as far as the eye could reach. A dull, flat, and uninteresting road it was, a blazing sun above, and a dry, stifling atmosphere below; not a breath of cool air to refresh the travellers as they wound slowly along. There was not a living creature in sight, not even a bird fluttering above their heads. Margaret chatted on, discussing one matter or another in a merry fitful way till she grew tired of talking. Then she leaned wearily back in the carriage and complained of the intense heat, and as though by mutual consent, they relapsed into silence. Margaret cast her eyes listlessly along the dreary road. Her thoughts flew away, whither neither his sympathies nor his interest could follow her, even if she had spoken them aloud. How few of our richest and sweetest thoughts are ever translated into words! And if they were, how few would be understood by those around us! Many may have gone through the same phasis of thought and feeling long ago and forgotten it; for while the outer actions of life and their visible results are remembered until the end, the mute impulse that has guided, the secret hopes and unuttered thoughts that have sweetened it, have passed from our memory and are no more remembered. The carriage rolled slowly along, and presently Margaret's quick eye caught sight of a diligence crawling over some slightly rising ground about a quarter of a mile before them. She directed her father's attention to it, adding,—

"Let us try to overtake it, papa. Who knows, perhaps Lucy may be in it! I have a fancy we shall meet them again somewhere on the road. I should think they must be *en route* for home by this time. I quite long to see some face I know; even Mr. Wynter would be better than nobody."

"Better than a great many somebodies," replied Mr. Brookland. "I consider him a delightful companion; as a cultivated, intellectual man generally is,"

"And very clever in his profession, I should think," said Margaret.

"And far more enlightened than his professional brethren," added Mr. Brookland; "he is willing to open his eyes to the light of a new truth, while they are wilfully blind and go on committing murders wholesale upon the old system. I do believe if heaven itself was a new institution, they would reject it, and run the old road to ruin in the opposite direction. Mr. Wynter seems to have sensible ideas on most things, and I shall be very glad if I can convince him of the grand truth of Homœopathy. I have asked him to pay us a visit at Brooklands, and I hope he will come."

"I hope he will," echoed Margaret.

A few more such hot, dreary drives, combined with some small discomforts, to which even the most luxurious travellers must submit, reconciled Mr. Brookland to return home to England some few weeks earlier than he had originally intended. In compliance with Margaret's wish, they remained but a couple of days in Paris, and then proceeded home to Brooklands. Margaret's heart beat higher and higher with every roll of the wheels that carried her nearer home. As they came within a few miles of it, she strained her eyes eagerly to catch the first glimpse of the green fields and waving trees that bounded Brookland Manor. Everything seemed to smile upon them. It was one of the brightest and freshest of spring days. The sun shone with genial warmth, and a soft west wind was blowing. The trees were covered with their most luxuriant foliage, and as far as the eye could reach, on every side the earth was clothed with its rich, verdant, varying green. Presently Margaret, who had been silent some moments, exclaimed—

"Look, papa, I can see the old tower on Keith's Hill. As soon as we get there, we shall be able to look down on Brooklands—dear Brooklands, how I love it!"

"You forget we shall still be three miles from home, and I do not believe, with the wildest stretch of imagination, you can distinguish even the chimney-pots."

"That does not signify—I know they are there, and, at least, it will be our own ground we tread upon, and our own people who surround us. Ten to one I shall know every face we meet. We have been so long among strangers,

papa, that the sight of an old acquaintance will be quite charming. I should even be glad to see Dan Jones, the deaf postman, the crossest, crankiest, ugliest man for miles round. Drive faster!"

The coachman lashed his horses. They soon reached Keith's Hill, and Margaret looked out with loving eyes over the broad lands that would one day call her mistress. She could see the curling columns of pale vapoury smoke up-rising from the distant villages which were scattered through the valleys, and here and there the tiny spire or low square steeple of a church could be easily distinguished. The sheep were browsing upon the hills, the cattle grazing in the meadows, while the labourers were working in the distant fields; but no sooner did they seem to catch sight of the carriage winding along the road, than they threw down spade and hoe, pickaxe and shovel, and hurried to meet the carriage at the next turning-point. Some men were engaged thatching an old farm-house that stood about fifty yards from the road, and all united in one hearty ringing cheer as the carriage rolled slowly past. Mr. Brookland replied to their welcoming voices with genial, old-fashioned courtesy, abating not one jot of his dignity; but Margaret bent eagerly forward, and her bright face seemed to flash back an answer to their cheery "hurrah!" as she smiled, waved her hand, and nodded to one or two whose faces she recognised. If she had been free to follow her natural impulse, she would have sprung from the carriage, and shaken their labour-stained hands all round, but that decorum and the artificial laws of society forbade, as it forbids many other things that are natural, honest, and true.

"There, papa," exclaimed Margaret, turning her excited face to him, "those rude, rough voices have made the sweetest music I have heard for many a day. It is almost worth while to go away from home for the mere pleasure of a welcome back."

The echo of the labourers' voices followed them far down the valley; then it became incorporated with, and swallowed up by the solemn sound of the church bell, which was slowly tolling a funeral knell. So joy and sorrow were once more walking side by side, sending a sweet savour into one life, and adding gall and bitterness to another; for grief is

bitter, though it may be a necessary ingredient in the cup. Glancing downward, they observed the melancholy cortege slowly approaching. It was a child's funeral; they saw that by the white-edged pall that fluttered in the breeze, while the humble mourners toiled after the corpse on foot. They were driving along a narrow lane, and Mr. Brookland ordered his coachman to draw up as close as possible under the hedge, and stop till the funeral procession had gone by. He bowed his uncovered head reverentially as the coffin passed him, as he always did in the presence of death, no matter whether the victim were of high or low degree. The mother's tear-stained, swollen eyes were lifted for a moment to Margaret's sympathetic face. A fresh burst of grief followed as she clutched her husband's arm, and tottered slowly on.

"That was poor Mary Carter, papa," said Margaret, all the brightness having died out of her eyes. "I daresay it is her crippled son that is dead, poor little fellow!—I never thought he would live so long. Ah! well," she added with a kind of comforting sigh, "he was not her only one; she has got plenty more—seven or eight, I believe, of all sorts and sizes."

"That will not make her loss one bit the less. Poor woman, I daresay of all the many she could ill spare one."

"But this one could be best spared, papa, for he was totally helpless, and would have been a burthen to her all his life," said Margaret.

"The burthen of an afflicted child is often one a mother loves best to carry," replied Mr. Brookland. "You remember what the song says, 'The bird we have nursed is the bird we love best.'"

"At any rate, she has plenty more to love; and I have heard you say that sorrow is weakened by being divided—so must affection be."

"Not at all; the sun shines on all the world alike; the light and warmth it gives to me robs you of nothing. It is the same with a mother's love—it embraces all, and, however large her family, there is never one too many."

"Ah! well," said Margaret, "all the arguments in the world would never convince me that you ever could have loved twenty Margarets as much as you love me."

"Oh! you are becoming personal, Maggie; and, I suppose, if I were to admit the possibility, I should wound your sensitive feelings."

"Of course you would, and I should demand fifty kisses on the spot to heal them."

They had now reached within half a mile of home, and taking a sharp curve to the right, they came upon a little chapel, timeworn and old, that had long fallen into disuse, and was gradually going to decay; it was said to have been erected in the latter part of the eleventh century, and was one of the great features of attraction in the neighbourhood. Two gentlemen had been scrambling over the ruins, and were at this moment examining the broken doorway with looks of intense interest; one of them Mr. Brookland thought he recognised, and calling to the coachman to stop, added,—

"I do believe that is our worthy rector, Maggie, he is never so happy as when he is groping among those crumbling tumble-down places—he must have been an antiquary from his cradle."

"Do not speak disrespectfully of antiquaries," replied Margaret. "You know you are a noted antiquary yourself."

"But of quite a different order, my child. I am only interested in that which is beautiful as well as old, such as glass, china, coins, books, and manuscripts, and I flatter myself I have a very fair collection. I do not profess to be interested in broken walls and ruined castles."

"You must not own as much to the rector, or he will preach a crusade against the degeneracy of the age we live in," answered Margaret laughing.

Immediately on recognising the Brookland liveries, the rector, Dr. Reeves, came briskly towards the carriage, accompanied by his companion.

The rector and Mr. Brookland exchanged greetings with the geniality of old companionship. Having made the usual complimentary and congratulatory speeches to Margaret, Dr. Reeves said,—

"You are just arrived at the right season; the Archæological Society holds a series of meetings here next week, when we hope to have a most delightful time. Allow me

to introduce my friend Mr. Joel Craig, one of the most valuable of its members. Mr. Joel Craig—Mr. Brookland.”

The gentleman indicated came forward, and with courteous good-breeding acknowledged Mr. Brookland’s kindly greeting. His large handsome eyes dilated with an expression of intense gratification as he said,—

“My name may be strange to your ears, but yours has long been familiar to mine. Only yesterday at our final meeting, there was a universal expression of regret at your absence from England.”

“Really, my dear Sir,” answered Mr. Brookland, “I had no idea I was of so much importance. In what possible way could my presence or absence affect your meeting?”

“In many ways. You must know that your collection of manuscript and antique gems is world-famous, and your residence itself, Brookland Hall, is an object of general curiosity and admiration, as it is one of the most venerable seats in the county.”

“Yes, it certainly is, and one of the finest, I think; but that may be an old man’s vanity, for I was born there, and my fathers before me,” replied Mr. Brookland, with delighted pride in his ancestral home.

“Few men can sit beneath their own roof-tree, and say as much,” said the agreeable stranger deferentially; “but as my friend Reeves was saying, we hold our annual gathering here next week, and had hoped to pay a visit of inspection to your beautiful home. Finding you were travelling on the Continent, we were compelled, though with much regret, to abandon our intention.”

“But, why Sir, why abandon it?” said Mr. Brookland, excitedly. “My housekeeper, under the direction of our good friend here, would have thrown it open to you without any difficulty. However, as I am now returned, if your final arrangements are not completed, I shall have great pleasure in receiving all the members of a society for which I have the highest respect, and I do not think they will complain of their welcome.”

Mr. Joel Craig was profuse in his acknowledgments of the privilege so courteously extended, while the reverend rector expiated upon the well-known liberality of the master of Brooklands. They made a brief apology for detaining the

travellers so long, and before they parted Mr. Joel Craig addressed Margaret, saying,—

“I hope Miss Brookland will not rebel against the threatened invasion? Our visit will be doubly grateful, if we have the countenance of the mistress, as well as the courtesy of the master.”

“I am always glad to receive my father’s visitors,” replied Margaret; “and in this instance they will be doubly welcome; for I anticipate much pleasure from the visit of the Society. I hope we shall be allowed to join some of the excursions.”

“We shall only be too happy to receive you,” he answered; “but I am afraid our grave Archæologists will be more attracted by modern beauty than by the remains of ancient art.”

“But we have no modern beauty to show them,” said Margaret, “everything that is worth admiring is old.”

“Not quite everything!” rejoined Mr. Joel Craig, bending an admiring gaze on her face.

“Everything, at least, that you will be expected to admire,” said Margaret, colouring slightly.

“Ay, but reality sometimes falls so short of our expectation, and sometimes soars so far above it.”

“Yes, it is really magnificent,” here broke in the rector’s voice; during the last few minutes he and Mr. Brookland had been chatting together. “Did you ever see anything more charming than the effect of light and shadow yonder? Look, Craig, go where you may, you will never see a finer prospect—is it not beautiful?”

“Beautiful, indeed,” echoed Mr. Craig, who had not moved his eyes from Margaret’s face. The rector spoke of the prospect, but he was thinking only of her.

“Perhaps Mr. Craig would like a private view of my treasures,” said Mr. Brookland; “if so, will you both come up and lunch with me to-morrow? Then you can make any suggestion, as to their arrangement, before the grand exhibition takes places.”

Dr. Reeves and his friend cordially accepted the invitation, made their adieux, and the carriage drove on.

“What a very agreeable man that Mr. Craig is; and remarkably handsome, do you not think so, Maggie?”

"Well, yes," answered Margaret, hesitating, "I suppose he would be called handsome."

"Not a doubt of it, and I should say he was a man of culture. I am very glad to have made his acquaintance."

"An agreeable acquaintance will be quite an acquisition at Brooklands; agreeable people are remarkably scarce everywhere," said Margaret, as she threw herself back in the carriage, warbling the old sweet melody of "Home, sweet Home," where in the course of a few minutes they arrived. From the highest to the lowest, the servants were assembled in the entrance hall, to welcome their young mistress and master home. They had a kind word, look, or smile for all; and with the elder servants, who had served them long and faithfully, they shook hands warmly, and then passed on up the wide staircase and along the corridor, where the pictured faces of their ancestors seemed to look down a smiling welcome. There were bright-eyed ladies and courtly gentlemen, and a very imposing assemblage they were, all in the varied and picturesque attire of the period in which they had severally lived. The family likeness disappeared sometimes for two or three generations, and then came out stronger than ever. This was peculiarly the case in the resemblance of a young and beautiful woman, in the costume of the time of Charles I., to the present heiress of Brooklands; the dreamy grey eyes, creamy complexion, the golden tinted hair, and even the contour of face and figure were the same. It looked like Margaret Brookland in masquerade; indeed, if she had let her hair fall in long curling tresses and put on a similar dress, you might have thought that Blanche Brookland, who had been resting in her grave for more than two centuries, had stepped out of the gilded frame and was alive again. Next to her, face to face, was the full length portrait of a young Royalist soldier, his frank fearless gaze looked straight into Blanche Brookland's dreamy eyes; a sportive smile hovered round the mouth, as though the artist had caught the rippling laughter, and fixed it on the painted lip. The portraits were both taken by Vandyck, in his very best style, and approaching as near to life as any portrait can. These two pictures attracted more attention than any others in the gallery, not only as specimens of the beauty of art, but the

beauty of nature also. Looking from one face to the other, they set you thinking, a strange sort of feeling came over you, and you felt there ought to be a story attached to them. And so there was ; it may be told presently, but not here. Margaret had a great affection for the memory of her ancestral relative, whose romantic story had been familiar to her from her childhood, and had been so popular as to throw Cinderella, and even little Red Riding Hood quite into the shade. Whenever she passed along the picture-gallery she always cast a glance at the departed beauty that had once been as fresh and blooming as her own. She did so now, and the dreamy eyes seemed to smile down upon her. She paused a moment before it, saying :—

“My beautiful Auntie, I wish you could speak, for I know you would say ‘Margaret, I am glad to see you home again.’ I wonder if she knows how much I admire her, Nurse?” she added, addressing that favourite individual, who had followed her up the stairs as fast as her portly person permitted.

“My dear Miss Margaret,” she replied, “how can you talk like that, when the poor lady’s been dust and ashes nigh on two hundred years.”

“But I suppose her spirit is not dust and ashes too,” said Margaret.

“No, it is to be hoped that has gone where it don’t want to come back again.”

“I do not know,” said Margaret thoughtfully. “I have such an intense sympathy and affection for her ; sometimes I fancy it may be her spirit that has descended to me. You have heard of the transmigration of souls, Nurse ?”

“Can’t say I have, my dear, but I have heard of the transportation of bodies, and very bad bodies too, that I think transportation’s too good for ’em.”

Margaret reached her luxurious suite of rooms and prepared for a pleasant chat with her old nurse, who by the length of years had become an indulgent friend as well as a faithful servant. They had scarcely arranged themselves to hear and tell the news, when Margaret was summoned to the drawing-room ; on entering which, she was seized in the arms of a tall, fair, slim lady, with long corkscrew ringlets

of a washed out brown colour, and pale blue eyes that were rather sharp and keen than bright.

"My dearest Margaret!" Mrs. Creamly exclaimed with gushing affection. "I am delighted to see you back. You will excuse my calling you Margaret?"

"I shall not excuse you if you call me anything else, for you have called me nothing but Margaret for the last ten years."

"You have been so long away dear, I though you were never coming back—but I suppose the time has passed pleasantly enough with you?"

Margaret acknowledged that it had flown.

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Creamly, "and so it used to fly with me at one time. When my poor dear papa was alive, we always went wherever we wished, sometimes abroad, sometimes to the seaside; but there are many strange changes in this world, my dear; the wheel of fortune is always turning round, sending some to the top, and some to the bottom."

"Then you know fortune is never standing still," said Margaret smiling, "at the next turn it may send you to the top."

"I do not care for myself, but I do feel for Mr. Creamly; it is very hard on him."

Mrs. Creamly had a way of alluding vaguely to the world generally as being harder upon her and her husband than upon other people. She brought no special charge of tyranny against anyone or anything, but always spoke as though the world generally was leagued against her in particular, and bore her trials with the fortitude of a Christian martyr, and dwelt on them as though she loved them. No matter how much you tried to shift the conversation, she always managed by an adroit turn to bring it back to her own small troubles, compared with which the sorrows of other people weighed as nothing in the scale. If she could have found anyone whose great-grandfather had squandered the family estate and impoverished his posterity, which had thus been reduced to exactly her own condition, she might have sympathised with them, not else. When she spoke of the world being hard on Mr. Creamly, Margaret said,—

"The world is hard on everybody, sometimes ; and, by-the-bye, that puts me in mind of Mrs. Carter—she has lost one of her children, I think. Poor woman, I daresay she thinks it is very hard on her."

"Those kind of people always do," replied Mrs. Creamly ; "they fancy everything is very hard. She ought to think it is a merciful relief, instead of which, she takes on in the most un-Christian fashion. It is really astonishing how the lower orders will rebel against the decrees of Providence."

"I am afraid that kind of rebellion is not confined to the lower orders," replied Margaret, who could not resist smiling. "Do you not think we all rebel a little sometimes?—you and I, as well as the rest of the world."

"I only rebel against the injustice of man, not against the will of God," replied Mrs. Creamly. "If Mr. Creamly had received common justice from his fellow-men, he would have sat upon the woolsack years ago."

"But that honourable seat can only be filled by one at a time," replied Margaret ; "there may be many who think they have equal rights, but only one can succeed."

"Yes, and that is generally the wrong one, my dear. I could tell you such stories of the present chancellor as would make your hair stand on end ; but I say nothing, and I name no names ; all I know is, that there is great reform wanted in the courts of law, and my dear husband has studied law and equity all his life, and it is no more use to him than it would be to a chimpanzee. Say what you like, Margaret, it *is* hard, and he feels his position keenly. If Mr. Creamly only had a chance, he would bring in an Act of Parliament for a general reform that would take the whole world by storm."

"Let us hope he will have the chance some day," said Margaret. "You know it is a long lane that has no turning."

"Yes, but sometimes it is so long that the first and the last turning leads only to the grave."

"But remember, my father has promised to use all his influence to obtain Mr. Creamly an appointment under Government, and I have no doubt he will succeed."

"Your father deserves a crown of glory, and if all men have their rights, he will get it one day."

Here, overpowered by her exuberant feelings, she paused for a moment; and Margaret hastened to divert the conversation into another channel.

"I am so glad we are home again," she said; "and it seems we have arrived at a favourable time, for I hear the Archæological Society meets at Yewbury next week."

"Ah, you have heard of that already! I hoped to be the first to bring the news; but I believe I was born an hour too late."

"We shall have quite a commotion at Brooklands," said Margaret. "Papa talks of inviting them here. A little excitement will be an agreeable change to the quiet folk here."

"Yes, it certainly will be delightful, and I hope *select*," replied Mrs. Creamly, emphasising the last word. "I plead guilty to poverty, but I *am* particular in my choice of acquaintances. I cannot bear to associate with vulgar people even for an hour—they act upon my nerves like a moral blister."

"In this case I do not think your nerves will be tried. People who are interested in archæological matters are generally gentlemen, or at least scholars," said Margaret.

"But, my dear Margaret, the baser metal will often circulate among the true, and it is difficult sometimes to tell gilded brass from pure gold. However, as you say, I think we are tolerably safe in this matter. There has been a gentleman here, Mr. Joel Craig, making all kinds of inquiries, and a most charming person he is. He and Mr. Creamly are great friends."

"He appears to be very pleasant," said Margaret. "We met him and Dr. Reeves as we were driving home."

"Then that is how you got your news!"

At this moment Mr. Brookland entered the room, shook hands warmly with Mrs. Creamly, and told her he was delighted to see her.

"We were just talking about the Archæological Society, papa," said Margaret.

"Ay," he answered, addressing Mrs. Creamly—"I suppose you are well informed about the matter? We shall have a gay time at Brooklands."

"Not *we*," replied that lady mildly; "in my humble position I must be content to be a mere looker-on."

"But we cannot allow that," he answered. "We intend to join all the excursions, and I was going to ask you to oblige me by chaperoning Margaret ; it would be doing me a great favour."

"That is *so* like you, Mr. Brookland !" replied Mrs. Creamly—"always doing good, and trying to hide your light under a bushel."

Mr. Brookland liked to do a good-natured thing, but hated to be thanked for it ; so he glided away from Mrs. Creamly's gratitude by asking her how the matter had been going on during his absence from Brooklands.

"Not so well as you would wish," she answered, gratified by his appeal. "Dr. Reeves is an orthodox man, but I do not think he does his duty, or there would never be such desecration of the Sabbath."

"Desecration of the Sabbath !" echoed Mr. Brookland. "I am sorry to hear that."

"You remember giving leave to the Ogle boys at the Hill farm to fish in your trout stream ?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, instead of going to church on the Sabbath day, they go fishing ; the eldest son was fishing the whole day last Sunday."

"What patience he must have had !" said Mr. Brookland ; "he ought to have been rewarded. What did he catch ?"

"Catch !" echoed Mrs. Creamly, amazed that no expression of horror had crossed Mr. Brookland's face—"I believe he caught a fine trout ; but that is not the question. Surely you cannot approve of fishing on the Sabbath day ?"

"Well," said Mr. Brookland, "he might do better, certainly, or he might do worse."

Mrs. Creamly departed with the conviction that Mr. Brookland's moral nature had received severe injuries during his sojourn in a Catholic country, which did not (according to her Protestant notion) honour the Sabbath day, nor keep it holy.



CHAPTER VIII.

MR. JOEL CRAIG.

“Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel ;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade.”



THE next day Dr. Reeves and his friend arrived punctually at the hour appointed. The favourable impression Mr. Brookland had received of Mr. Joel Craig on their first brief meeting, was deepened on a nearer acquaintance. Seldom has a dinner gone off with so much satisfaction to all parties as that at Brookland Hall. Mr. Joel Craig made himself a most agreeable companion, and cast the mild orthodox twaddle of Dr. Reeves quite in the shade. No topic of conversation seemed to come amiss to him ; he spoke fluently and in a pleasant fashion, learnedly on many subjects, intelligently on all. In Mr. Brookland's eyes he seemed to be a walking Encyclopædia, who had only to turn over the leaves of his mind till he came to the right page, where you would find all the information you might require told in the most agreeable manner. He had all the apparent frankness of the Englishman, the subtlety of the German, and the politeness of the Frenchman. Into whatever stream the conversation flowed, he went with the current. Once or twice Margaret fancied he got a little out of his depth during a discussion on ecclesiastical affairs ; but if he did, he turned back so

cleverly, that you could hardly tell whether he had lost his footing or not. When the conversation on that subject began to flag, he took the helm, and steered straight into the heart of New Zealand affairs. He pointed out the blunders of home and colonial government, and gave an interesting description of the geological treasures of the country. He said there was copper and gold enough to buy up all Europe, but there was no spirit, either public or private, enterprising enough to undertake a voyage of discovery. He kept up a rippling current of laughter as he told them of some of his own adventures with the natives, which were wonderful, if true. From that uncultivated region they gradually came back to more civilised lands; paid verbal visits to the seats of learning, and marts of pleasure. He discussed fashions with Margaret, told her where she could find the most *recherché* bonnets, and the cheapest lace; talked to Mr. Brookland of the state of the arts and sciences, past and present, ancient and modern, and to Dr. Reeves of Jeremy Taylor, Louth, and Tennyson.

Dinner was over, and Margaret, indeed the whole of them, thought they had never known time pass so pleasantly. She sat a long time, much longer than ladies usually linger, over the dessert, listening to the bright sallies and quaint humours of this new acquaintance. At last she withdrew with some regret. Her face was flushed with excitement, and bright with smiles, as she slowly ascended the stairs. For some time she sat alone in that large luxurious room, with its gilded cornices and painted ceiling. The walls were covered with rare pictures; inlaid cabinets of choice workmanship were laden with rich china and delicate ornaments of ormolu; the luxurious chairs and sofas were covered with amber-tinted satin. Beautiful herself, and surrounded by all that is beautiful in art or nature, Margaret sat for some time waiting. There was something suggestive of sadness in the look of the fair young figure, alone in that silent, solemn grandeur, with no echoing voices or pattering feet of brothers or sisters round her, and saddest, worst of all, no mother to be her friend and companion, watching the awakening of her woman's nature, and giving the sympathy or guidance necessary at that critical period of girlish life. It is true she had a most fond and doting father; but a man's devotion is

a poor substitute for a mother's tender love. His vision is limited, he can neither see nor understand the delicate organisation of the feminine nature. However anxious he may be to comprehend it, he still gropes in the dark, and not understanding, can never supply its need.

Mr. Brookland was no exception to the general run of mankind. If he saw health upon Margaret's cheeks, and a smile upon her lips, he was satisfied. She had only to express a wish, and so far as his wealth or will had power, it was gratified. He considered his child, the heiress of Brooklands, the most fortunate as well as the happiest of created beings ; and so, according to the general acceptance of the term, she was ; yet there were times when a feeling of restlessness crept over her, and she would walk about the grand old house, out of one splendid apartment into another, until she grew weary ; she would then go into her nurse's room, and listen again and again to the little odds and ends, scraps and facts, of her dead mother's life ; and when she went to bed, she would cry herself to sleep in unutterable loneliness of spirit. In fact, there was too much monotony in her life for her to be perfectly happy. She had no companion of her own age, she was too much alone. Her tour abroad had given a fillip to her existence.

During those few short days and hours, when she had enjoyed the society of Lucy and Mr. Wynter, she had tasted that sympathy and intellectual companionship which had hitherto been denied to her, and on this evening they were both present to her mind. Somehow, she could not help contrasting Paul Wynter's quiet, unobtrusive manner, spiritual face, and low sweet voice, with the bold assurance, superb physique, and rich deep tones of the new acquaintance they were now entertaining.

Mr. Craig dazzled and diverted the senses, but Paul Wynter's more poetical and gentle genius attracted and enchained the heart. Her father had invited him to Brooklands, and she wondered if he would come, and when. Then her thoughts flew to Lucy, and in her mind she organised many pleasant plans to amuse and entertain her when she visited Brooklands, for she was to be speedily invited. Presently she got up, went to the window, threw it wide open, and looked out over the broad lands that would one

day call her mistress. A soft dreamy expression stole slowly over her face as she sat gazing out, as though in search of something she could not find. Her thoughts flew away over hill and dale, wood and valley; she was unconsciously watching and waiting for some new phenomenon to break in upon her life, and change its bright monotonous hue to varied and vivid colours, blurred with scarlet passion flowers, and blotted with grim grey griefs. If the course of her life had flowed on serene and untroubled, free from the touch of sorrow or the stain of tears, there would be nothing to write about, and Margaret Brookland would have gone unnoticed to her grave. Her abstracted mood was soon interrupted by the entrance of the gentlemen.

"We shall only trouble you for a cup of tea, Miss Brookland," said Dr. Reeves, "then we are going to ransack your father's study, and have a rummage among his books and manuscripts."

"I think we ought to apologise to Miss Brookland for staying away so long," said Mr. Craig.

"Pray don't, I hate apologies," replied Margaret; "besides, I really have not missed you."

"Candid, but not kind," he answered, "for we have missed *you*. As soon as you left us, our spirits sank fifty degrees, the sparkle died out of our wit, till it came out like flat champagne the day after the feast."

Margaret bridled her tongue; she did not care to bandy light words with this gentleman, who was, she thought, overbold in his speech, and forward in his manners, considering the brevity and chance-nature of their acquaintance; besides, this gay badinage verged sometimes upon grave sentimentality, into which they had once or twice drifted during dinner time. Such a style of conversation might have been all very well in a public ball-room, but it was out of place there, where she was alone, young, and the solitary mistress of her father's mansion. She felt this, and though, girl-like, she was sorely tempted to indulge her natural spirits in a merry vivacious war of words with this new acquaintance, yet she restrained her inclination, and sat demurely down, busying herself with the dainty china, pouring out tea and coffee, listening to the mild twaddling, but strictly orthodox views, of Dr. Reeves on Ritualism and Low Church. Occasionally

she caught a stray word or glance from her father or Mr. Craig, who were discussing various matters on the opposite side of the table. By degrees her attention was attracted wholly away from Dr. Reeves, who went prosing on, as though he were preaching a sermon to his rural congregation in the village church. His monotonous tone would, at any other time, have had a soporific effect upon her nerves, but now she kept wide awake, and answered "Yes" or "No" to whatever he said; while her eyes were constantly straying to the other side of the table, and her ears caught fragmentary scraps of the conversation that was being carried on between her father and Mr. Craig. They had touched on many subjects, in a desultory sort of way; and at last they got to Hygienics, and of course Mr. Brookland could not avoid bringing forth his pet theory on the subject of Galvanism, to which his visitor listened with profound attention, occasionally substantiating Mr. Brookland's assertions by an alleged fact of his own experience.

"I assure you, my dear Sir," he said, "Galvanism is more extensively believed in and practised than you seem to imagine. In America it has a wide popularity, and there can be no doubt it was adopted as a certain remedy, or rather preventive, by the ancient Greeks."

"Indeed," exclaimed Mr. Brookland, deeply interested. "I should be glad to have that assertion verified. I consider myself tolerably well up in the history of Greece, classical and otherwise, and I must say I never remember to have seen the matter alluded to."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Craig, "but your studies and inclinations would lead you into the higher and nobler walks of classic lore. You would not dive into the courts and alleys, and inquire into the sanitary condition of the nation. The book that would treat of such matters would not be likely to fall into your hands."

"There is some truth in that," replied Mr. Brookland; "but I should like to know where you have found the subject treated on; to me it is a deeply interesting one."

"I cannot at this moment tell you precisely where I found my information, but I will rack my brain until I find out, and send you to the same source."

"I shall be greatly indebted to you if you will ; I had believed Galvanism to be a modern invention."

"Quite the reverse," replied Mr. Craig ; "it is merely the resurrection of a dead idea. I have my own theory in the matter of this Galvanism, that has created such a sensation in the world these last few years. We all know what plagiarists these Americans are ; and the Greek slave, instead of being an original production, is a mere copy of an ancient Grecian statue ; only instead of the fetters being symbols of slavery, the girl is in reality bound in galvanic chains to keep off an attack of rheumatism, or perhaps to cure a love-fever, for these old Greeks were a sensitive race."

"What an absurd idea !" exclaimed Margaret, laughing now outright ; "you cannot expect us to believe that."

"Certainly I do not," he answered candidly, "I have no authority for such an assertion, I am merely expressing my own theory."

"And a very original one it is," said Mr. Brookland, smiling at the whimsical idea.

"And very foolish," exclaimed Margaret, "as some people's original ideas are, remarkably original for their absurdity, and for nothing else."

"A foolish idea may sometimes be worth a wise man's study," said Mr. Joel Craig, "for *he* will find something in it that is not folly. Many things that seem worthless, are found on an investigation to be beyond price."

"I have heard a celebrated man say he would give a hundred pounds for a new idea," said Dr. Reeves, rising up and joining in the discourse.

"Yes," replied Margaret archly ; "but a great deal depends on where the idea comes from, and what it leads to. If it comes from nothing and leads to nowhere, it can be nothing worth."

"I see, Miss Brookland is inclined to declare war against me—a war of wits as well as words," said Mr. Joel Craig.

"Oh ! no," she answered ; "I shall be sorry to enter into a contest with *you*, for you would be sure to conquer."

"I do not know about that," he replied, answering her

in the same strain ; "if I were to fall into your hands, I should never hope to escape without bearing away with me some marks of the engagement."

"You will be more fortunate than the rest of Miss Brookland's friends, if you do not leave a bit of your heart behind you," rejoined the doctor.

"I shall be very well content if I am allowed to carry away the fragments," said Mr. Craig.

"You may carry it away whole," replied Margaret as she rose from the table, "for I never encumber myself with useless lumber."

The gentlemen retired to Mr. Brookland's study, and occupied themselves dipping into his various treasures until late in the evening.

The intimacy between Mr. Joel Craig and Mr. Brookland ripened so rapidly that before the week was out he was as much at home there as the master himself. He had free access to the library at all times, and created an entire revolution among the old books and manuscripts. He penetrated to the depths of cavernous closets, and dug up entombed volumes that had lain there unnoticed for years. Mr. Brookland was his own librarian, and fancied he kept his sanctum in perfect order, and so to a certain extent he did. If he took down a book, he put it back into its place again ; but there were some thousands of volumes lying on the upper shelves, loaded with dust, and dropping to pieces for want of care. From out of various damp dark recesses some rare valuable books and manuscripts were brought to light by the indefatigable Mr. Joel Craig. He suggested many important alterations in the re-arrangement of the library, the coins, and many other matters connected therewith, for which the master of Brooklands was really grateful. For many years he had intended to have his library re-arranged and properly catalogued, and some old worm-eaten chests of books and MSS. examined, but he had never had the courage to undertake the work himself, and he had never met with any one who seemed sufficiently interested to undertake the labour, and in whom he could place confidence, until now that he had met with Mr. Craig, who seemed to understand exactly, not only what to do, but how to do it. Into his hands Mr. Brook-

land felt he should have no hesitation in confiding his beloved books and manuscripts.

Mr. Joel Craig's society cheered and enlivened Mr. Brookland, who now laughed oftener and more heartily than he had done for many a day. He thoroughly enjoyed the hours they spent together among those old musty volumes.

Margaret was delighted to see her father in such good spirits, and troubled herself very little about Mr. Joel Craig. They rarely met, except at luncheon or dinner-time—the latter meal was generally honoured by the presence of Dr. Reeves; in the evening they usually played a rubber of whist.

Margaret could not help seeing she was an object of great admiration to Mr. Joel Craig, and was by no means displeased at being admired. At times, however, there was something in his manner that grated against her ideas of propriety. She fancied he made himself too much at home, and she was occasionally disposed to doubt how far he was sincere in his demeanour to her father. To her calm, penetrating eyes he seemed to humour or to play upon her father's peculiarities, with whose prejudices he invariably agreed. Examine him as closely as she would, she could never discover whether he was honest or only playing a part. He seemed to have found out that peculiar organ in phrenology called love of approbation, and took care to keep it always in tune. No wonder Mr. Brookland found him such an agreeable companion.

Once, during the week before the grand Archæological meeting, Mr. and Mrs. Creamly were invited to dinner. During all the years of their acquaintance, Margaret had never seen the smiles rippling so constantly over that suffering lady's face. Mr. Joel Craig seemed to act like magic on her. No doubt she had murmured the history of her family sorrows into his attentive ear. Indeed, Margaret had heard him telling her anecdotes of her great-grandfather, which she had never heard before, interspersing his information with traits of character, in prosperity and adversity, with such precision, that he might have been taken for the "Ulster king-at-arms" detailing the vicissitudes of families. She was enchanted with him;

she listened to him with greedy ears, and would fain have had the rest of the company listen to him too. Occasionally she glanced uneasily round the table while other subjects were being discussed, as though she would have stifled all conversation that did not relate to her family fortunes ; but however interesting that subject might be to her, it was neither interesting nor amusing to other people. They turned a deaf ear to the alluring words with which she tried to awaken curiosity or obtain remark, and took no notice of her significant nods and smiles. She and Mr. Craig for a time had the conversation to themselves. Presently she pounced upon her husband, he being the only person over whom she had any legitimate control, and he was compelled to hear of the departed glories of her house from other lips besides her own. He was so accustomed to have the history of his wife's family filtered through his ears, that he knew it by heart, and could tick off the history of their lives for ten generations, as some people tell off the ten commandments ; but Mr. Craig told him much that he had never known before.

A quiet, courtly gentleman was Mr. Creamly, well bred, and born with great expectations, which had dwindled away one by one, and left him at the age of thirty with the world before him, and his bread to win. He tried the law, and failed ; tried the Church (that refuge for the destitute), and failed there also. At the present time he was managing clerk to a county banker—a position of trust for which his high integrity rendered him peculiarly fitting. The Creamlys did not keep up a brisk visiting acquaintance ; they were too poor, and poverty is an effectual bar to that sort of thing ; but they were intimate at Brooklands, where they were held in far greater esteem than the pompous banker himself. Indeed, it is highly probable Mr. Creamly would have settled down satisfied with his lot and with the world generally, but his wife so often told him he was injured by that hydra-headed monster, that he ended by believing it. Sometimes he forgot himself so far as to fancy there were a thousand other people in the world worse off than himself, and to become oblivious of departed glories ; but his wife gave a strong refresher to his memory, and sent the buried bones

of her ancestors rattling about his ears, till he blushed for his meanness. As a rule he talked very little ; he would sit for hours together with an absent expression on his countenance, saying and doing nothing. At such times his wife said his thoughts were too great and too deep for utterance, and if anyone had attempted to fathom his mysterious silence, they would have been lost in the depth of his intellect. As she said, his mind was a mine of wealth, and nobody but herself was allowed to descend to the diggings.

Mr. Creamly listened to Mr. Joel Craig's revelations with profound respect, but they soon ceased. Mr. Joel Craig found a more agreeable occupation in picking walnuts for Margaret, and Mr. Creamly collapsed into a state of somnolency, and before many minutes had elapsed he was apparently unconscious of all that was passing round him.

In due time the Archæological Society held their meeting at Yewbury, and Mrs. Creamly had the pleasure of chaperoning Margaret everywhere ; and a most vigilant chaperon she was—fluttering round Margaret like an old hen round a newly-fledged chicken. They went on some very interesting excursions in different parts of the county, and in the evening met in the Town Hall, drank weak tea, and listened to the usual amount of fantastic twaddle which generally signalises such occasions. Everybody seemed to make a speech of some kind ; but Mr. Joel Craig certainly had a brilliant success—he made one of the most amusing speeches of the whole party.

He enlivened the grave subjects with a species of humorous illustration, which diverted and did not weary the audience. He made some allusion to Kirwell, which had formerly been one of the family estates of a lady then present, whose husband, Mr. Creamly, could perhaps give more and better information upon the subject than himself. The sound of the name of “Creamly” in that large hall, and before such an audience, made Mr. Creamly blush up to the roots of his hair, while Mrs. Creamly almost bounded from her seat with delight.

Mr. Creamly being called upon by the chairman to give some information on the subject, with a rush of enthusiasm scrambled to his feet. Having arrived there, and finding

himself face to face with so many people, all eyes being turned expectantly towards him, he became dizzy and confused, and stood for a moment in a state of bewilderment. Presently he gained courage, he "apologised for getting up, and begged leave to sit down again," and his proposition was received with thunders of applause. His wife whispered anxiously in Margaret's ear—

"You see how it is, my dear; the rush of thought cramps the power of speech; I am not half so clever at *thinking*, but I know I can *talk* better. I wish I were a man, or that a lady could without impropriety take possession of the platform. I'd give them some very interesting information upon the subject of the ancient aristocracy of England."

Mr. Brookland gave a brilliant entertainment to the Archæological Society before the proceedings closed. All the treasures of Brooklands were thrown open for their inspection. Many a long day had passed since the old hall had presented so magnificent an appearance, brilliant with lights and filled with gay company. Mr. Brookland did not confine his invitations to the members of the Society only, he invited all the families of distinction for miles round, and his invitations were liberally responded to. The sideboards were laden with rich services of gold and silver plate, and every available space was filled with bright flowers, making the scene gorgeous with their many-tinted beauty. Margaret, dressed in her simplest attire, but in her sweetest smiles, fluttered about with bird-like grace. She seemed to be everywhere, adding warmth and light to her father's splendid hospitality.

That evening closed the proceedings of the Society. The next day the different members took their leave of the place and of each other, with the usual complimentary speeches. After their departure, a sudden hush seemed to fall upon Brooklands; a drowsy feeling appeared to creep over it and everybody, and even Mrs. Creamly's busy ceaseless buzz could scarcely keep Margaret's senses awake. The loss of Mr. Joel Craig's society left a blank in Mr. Brookland's mind. He missed him, the companion of a day, more than he would have missed many older, perhaps wiser men who had been the associates of his life. He was bewildered by the state of confusion into which his manuscripts, his books

and his art-treasures had been thrown during the the visit of the Archæological Society. Everything had been deranged for the occasion, and he could not put them in order. He had neither the courage nor the energy to set about the work.

One morning as they sat at breakfast, the post-bag was brought in. He sorted the letters as usual. There was one for Margaret, bearing the Penzance post-mark.

"From Lucy," she said, glancing at the superscription as she took it from her father's hand. The post this morning seemed to have brought pleasant news to them both, for Mr. Brookland looked up with an unusually pleased expression of countenance saying,—

"From Mr. Joel Craig, my dear—he kindly offers to come down and catalogue my books, arrange my manuscripts, set all my coins and other little matters in order. I shall be delighted to see him—very. I think he shall have the blue room, Margaret."

"What! is he to stay here, in the house, papa?" said Margaret, looking as though such an arrangement would not be most agreeable to her.

"Of course he is—why not?" replied Mr. Brookland, lifting his eyes sharply to her face.

"Oh! I do not know; only it seems so odd," replied Margaret, balancing her tea-spoon carelessly on the edge of the cup.

"And why odd? You did not seem to think it odd when I asked Mr. Wynter here."

"Ah! that is quite a different thing," said Margaret. "Has Mr. Craig fixed any time for coming?"

"No: he says he shall be engaged for the next week or en days."

"I am glad of that, for I have got a nice little plan in my head, papa," replied Margaret, in her pretty, coaxing way. "Here is a letter from Lucy, inviting me to spend a week with her in Cornwall."

"That is simply impossible," said Mr. Brookland, decidedly.

"Well, I suppose it is just a little bit impossible," rejoined Margaret; "not but what I should enjoy living among cream and cows for a day or two; but what I propose is

this : you know—or, perhaps, you do not know, so I tell you—Rose Vale Farm is only seven miles from Penzance. Well, you shall take me to Penzance for a week's sea-bathing ; it would be delightful in this warm weather, do not you think so ? We can drive over now and then to see dear Lucy ; and when we leave we can bring her away with us to spend a week or two at Brooklands. There, I call that a delightful arrangement ; we shall pair beautifully—Lucy and I, you and Mr. Joel Craig.”

“Pair beautifully indeed !” repeated Mr. Brookland, smiling on her bright glowing face. He made some few faint objections, but as soon as he brought them forward, she dexterously overcame them all ; and the next day the few necessary preparations were made, and he was carried off, it must be confessed, slightly against his will, to Cornwall.





CHAPTER IX.

AN ENGLISH FARMER.

“And you good yeomen,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture.”



ABOUT four miles from Penzance, on the road to the Land's End, stands an old irregular farmhouse, with gabled windows and thatched roof, the wide porch covered with honeysuckles and wild roses. Before it, occupying nearly an acre of ground, was a wild, unformed garden, full of untrained, sweet-smelling flowers of variegated hues, the bright colours contrasting artistically one with another, and making the confusion charming. It was not “laid out” according to the *Gardener's Chronicle*; hence there was no stiffness nor set pieces of attraction—violet bordered with red or green, or *vice versa*; but there were rich masses of colour, which attracted the eye at every turn with their beauty. One portion was set apart for an orchard, and the apple and pear trees were laden with their delicate blossoms. At one side of this orchard was a swing-gate, which opened into a narrow lane, or bridle-path, which crossed the meadows and ran far away into the corn and clover fields. There were acres of grass-land stretching far beyond—for Mr. Nutford, who owned the farm, bred cattle, churned butter, and made cheeses. The side of the house fronted the high road, but was some hundred yards from it. The intervening space, littered with straw, was occupied by

chickens and pigs, with occasional inroads of ducks and geese, who had a large pond close by, for their own recreation, and yet could not let their neighbours alone. A narrow pathway, separated from the farm-yard by a low paling, led to the house. The sheds, outhouses, and granaries were scattered at the back of the house. The road from Penzance to Rose Vale Farm lay through some of the most picturesque scenery of the West of England ; and so Mr. Brookland and Margaret thought as they drove along to pay the much-desired visit to Lucy Nutford. Once, by a sudden transition, they passed near the mouth of an exhausted mine ; the long rows of miners' huts, deserted, dilapidated, and fast falling to ruin. The absence of vegetation gave the place a most desolate appearance, for not a tree, nor even a buttercup or daisy, was to be seen upon the stony broken ground ; but in a few minutes they were again in the pleasant green lanes, with the birds singing in the boughs overhead, and the bright sunlight glancing through the trembling leaves.

Margaret was in a perfect fever of excitement, wondering what Lucy's home was like, hoping there would be nothing coarse or vulgar in her surroundings, that would be likely to offend Mr. Brookland's taste, and prejudice him against their more intimate acquaintance. It was rather against his will the journey was taken, but Margaret hoped it might come to a satisfactory conclusion. He had no objection to Lucy ; he liked her well enough, and was grateful for her attention to his daughter during their sojourn at the Splügen Hôtel. On his own part he had fraternised freely with the old farmer, there was something in the sterling honesty and pride of the man that pleased him ; but, as matters stood then, the association was unavoidable, now things were different. With his goodwill he would never have renewed the acquaintance, but Margaret was infatuated with Lucy, and what she wished he had no courage to deny. His chief object in life was to make her happy, and he was wise enough to know that he could not do that by consulting his own wishes only—he must consult hers likewise.

The man who drove them from the Marine Hotel at Penzance knew Rose Vale Farm well, and as soon as they came in sight of the house he pointed out the quaint gables to Margaret. Her eyes, well pleased, wandered round and

about it, over the fields and meadows, as though in search of some familiar form or face. She had no knowledge, and but a hazy, dreamy notion of farm life; she would not have been surprised if she had seen Lucy out in the fields among the cows and milk-pails. But no Lucy was to be seen. The labourers were at work in the distant field, and the cattle were grazing in the meadows. A quiet calm surrounded the house itself.

As they drove round the winding highway, the sweet scent of the early roses was wafted towards them from the flower-garden; on the other side the ducks quacked and splashed about, the cocks crowed, and the pigs ran grunting about in the straw; while a patient old mare hung her head over the half-door of her stable, and seemed to be wisely considering the scene. Altogether the house and its surroundings had a serene pleasant look, as it lay bathed in the sunlight.

"This is Rose Vale Farm, Sir," said the coachman, as he drew up at the gate and opened the carriage door, "and there ain't a finer place, nor a finer lot o' cattle for miles round."

"You will wait," said Mr. Brookland, as he descended, and helped Margaret to alight.

"Wait! to be sure I will, Sir—folks allus wait at Rose Vale. You see, it's a long way from everywhere, and nobody never thinks o' goin' away till they've paid a visit to the kitchen; for they're right liberal, the Nutfords is, to man and beast—leastways, *he* is—same as Miss Lucy, only she's a little more proud-like." The latter piece of information he gave in a lower tone, glancing round as if he did not want to be heard.

The sound of the carriage wheels and their sudden stoppage at the gates, brought some of the domestics out from the back of the house; but they only stared curiously, and never attempted to come forward, as any well-bred domestic would do. The little cow-boy swinging on the gate stopped whistling, and stared too.

At the front of the house all was quiet, except for the cooing of a pair of ring-doves, hanging in a large wicker cage opposite the porch. Within it was the prettiest picture of all—there was Lucy herself, literally buried in flowers, above, below, and around her; she sat before a rustic table

laden with bright-coloured, sweet-smelling flowers ; she must have ransacked the garden and robbed it of its choicest and fairest gems. Some were tossed aside as though half rejected, others were tastefully arranged, and tied in bouquets, with narrow ribbon ; her white hand hovered with bird-like grace among the gay-coloured things, as though scarce knowing where to settle down. Everything about her looked pure and fresh and graceful, though she, in her maiden beauty, was the most graceful of all. She wore a simple holland dress, well suited for country wear, and her dark, crisp hair was tied back with pink ribbons. She heard the sound of their footsteps on the gravel, and glanced up from her employment. An expression of delight flashed into her face, she let fall her lapfull of flowers, and sprang from her seat to give her friend a hearty and loving welcome.

"Dear Margaret, how glad I am to see you !" she said, as they warmly embraced one another—"and you too," she added, giving her hand to Mr. Brookland ; "my father will be more than pleased to welcome you to Cornwall."

"I am afraid we have taken you by surprise," he said, as he returned her greeting with genial courtesy ; "but I hope we have not come at an inconvenient time."

"Our friends can never come at an inconvenient time," she answered, with a charming smile. "I am certainly taken by surprise, but it is the sweetest I have ever had. But I must not keep you standing here ; come in, please, unless you would like to go over the farm ; I daresay we shall find my father somewhere, and not very far off. He believes the old saying, 'the eye of the master doeth more work than the hand of the servant,' and he acts accordingly," she added ; "he is so proud of his activity, that he is always at work—he is never to be caught napping."

They agreed to her proposition, and she led the way by the narrow garden paths, and across the orchard, lifting aside the heavy branches, and glancing back beneath them, to see that her friends followed her without inconvenience. They soon reached the open grass-land, and sauntered on, chatting as they went, the girls linked arm-in-arm. They came occasionally on groups of labourers, sometimes of

women, working in the fields, and Lucy had a smile of recognition or a kind word for everybody—sometimes a direction to give, or an inquiry to make. Her manner to them was easy, cheery, and pleasant, and they could not have treated her with more respect if she had been the lady of the manor. Once Margaret pressed her father's hand, and cast an expressive look in his face, as much as to say, "You see, I have no reason to be ashamed of the friend I have chosen." Presently, in an adjoining field, they caught sight of Mr. Nutford superintending the working of a new drilling-machine. As soon as he saw them approaching, he seemed to give a few parting directions to his men, and then strode across the heavily-ploughed field to meet them. He took off his hat while he was still some paces from them; the sun, shining on his iron-grey hair, made it glisten like silver. He bowed somewhat reverentially to Margaret, but he gripped Mr. Brookland's thin delicate hand in his broad brown palm, as though he never meant to let it go again, and his voice had a hearty, honest ring of pleasure in it as he said—

"Mr. Brookland, Sir, I am mighty glad to see you— young lady likewise," and he nodded to Margaret, "and I take your visit kindly, for it's what I never expected, and I've said as much to Lucy scores of times."

"You have said a great deal too much," replied Lucy. "Now do not say it over again, father, for I will not hear it."

"I daresay it is something treasonable against us," said Margaret, "so we will not listen."

"'Twasn't exactly treason," said Mr. Nutford—"it was only natural; as I said, it isn't likely as Mr. and Miss Brookland, being, which they are, real gentry theirselves, will think any more of us plain folks; it was all very well to take up wi' us in them savage countries, but things is different in England, and it won't do," he added, emphatically; "they'll forget all about us."

"And what right had you to suppose anything of the kind?" said Margaret, wheeling round, and confronting him with a look of mock indignation. "How dare you take to yourself the virtue of remembering, and accuse us of the crime of forgetting?—accuse us, too, behind our

backs, when we had no power to defend ourselves! It is lucky we came down, or you might have gone so far as to condemn us without a hearing."

"You have got a hearing now, Maggie, at any rate," said Mr. Brookland, who had felt a twinge of conscience while Mr. Nutford was speaking—it was like hearing his own thoughts uttered aloud, but he did not care to own them. "I should like to know what Mr. Nutford can say in his defence."

"Lord bless you, Sir," replied Mr. Nutford, with a broad grin of delight, "I wouldn't go for to defend myself against such a pretty creatur' as that, far otherwise. She's welcome to be pecking at my foolishness—I wouldn't stop her, no more 'n I'd stop a pretty canary bird as had perched upon my shoulder, and pleased itself a pecking at my rough brown cheek. What I got to say is this, I'm mighty glad to give you a west country farmer's welcome, and will try to make the place pleasant to you as long as you like to stay. No fear of damp sheets here, and no living on sour krout and winiger, though they do give it a French name, and call it win ordinaire."

His face fell when Mr. Brookland told him they were staying at Penzance, and had only come over to spend an hour or two.

"Ay, I see," said he, with a good-humoured twinkle in his eye. "You come over to reconnoitre the ground before you venture on a wider field of acquaintance. Well, Sir, come into the house and see the missus, she'll be as glad to see you as I am, though maybe she mayn't say as much; for she's sparing of her tongue before strangers, she keeps the best of it for me."

He led the way into the best parlour, a large low-roofed room, with a latticed window looking out upon the garden. Everything here was arranged with exquisite neatness and order. A trace of Lucy's presence seemed lingering everywhere, the vases were filled with flowers, and the wide fireplace with fresh evergreens. The floor was as bright as beeswax and hard labour could make it, the large old-fashioned settle and chairs were covered with light glossy chintz. There were book-shelves arranged against the wall, and all well filled with an excellent selection of books,

Lucy's property, and her work-basket, with a good assortment of woman's work, and odds and ends of many kinds and colours. The walls were decorated with rough sketches and water-colour drawings, some of them executed with great power, yet they were evidently the productions of uncultivated genius.

This was the state apartment of the house, and was used by the family on state occasions only; Lucy, however, had of late taken possession of it, and there she could retire whenever she wished to be alone, away from the bustle of the house and the noise of the farm-yard. Mr. Nutford himself was not at home there, that was evident. The room was suggestive of his best black suit and the silver teapot; he seemed as though he could hardly reconcile himself to sit down in his working dress.

"That is Lucy's room mostly," he informed Mr. Brookland. "She don't take much to the farm duties, nor she's got no call to. I don't mind work myself, it's what I'm used to, but she isn't, and I don't want her to soil her pretty white hands in labour of any sort. I've a fine taste that way, I like to see my Lucy looking perky and fresh about the house, as bright and happy as a bird. I don't mind my hands being coarse and rough, so as I can keep hers delicate and white."

Mr. Brookland felt inclined to inquire the object of these white hands and delicate breeding, but he did not. Lucy was evidently the pet folly of the farmer's life; besides, he had a sort of sympathy with him—he thought of his own Margaret, and was not Lucy too an only child? Upon this subject, however, he was soon set right; glancing round the room, he observed the sketches on the wall, and remarked that Lucy's hands could do something better than simply look delicate and white, if these graceful labours were hers, as he supposed they were.

"Oh! no, Lucy don't do anything of that sort—my boy did them, some on 'em before he was twelve years old," replied Mr. Nutford; "he's a genius, Sir, and I'm main proud of him. They do say he'll be a great painter one day."

"You have a son, then?" said Mr. Brookland, with some surprise, for he had heard no allusion to the son till now.

"Blessed be God, yes, Sir. It isn't every man that's so lucky with his children as I am; they both take after their mother, who, as I told you before, was a real lady, being own cousin to a captain in the militia."

Mr. Nutford attached great importance to this fact, and never allowed his friend to forget it.

Mr. Brookland looked at the sketches with the eye of a connoisseur, who was capable of appreciating the untaught efforts of a boy.

"How old was your son when he produced these?" he inquired, pointing to two or three that exhibited great originality and promise.

"About thirteen, Sir."

"How old is he now?"

"Going for twenty; being exactly a year and three days younger than Lucy."

"If a lad of thirteen could produce such a sketch as that, he ought to have been heard of in the world long before he was twenty," said Mr. Brookland, thoughtfully.

"Ay, Sir, but he must bide his time; there are so many other folks in the world as are never heard of at all. Seems to me that the world's like a great cauldron, where the scum rises mostways to the top."

"Perhaps I could be of some service to your son!" exclaimed Mr. Brookland. "Shall I have the pleasure of seeing him here?"

"Well, no, Sir, I wish you could—he is away in London, working at some things, studying at others. You see, Mr. Brookland, though I'm only a plain farmer, I've got my feelings, same as other folks—they may be right or they may be wrong—you see, Sir, I'm ambitious."

"So are most men," said Mr. Brookland. "Ambition in some form or shape has a corner in every home—we all want to climb up to something that seems to hang above our reach."

"I don't," replied Mr. Nutford, emphatically. "I am content to be plain John Nutford to the end of my days; but I should like my children to be otherwise. I should like them to rise in the world—fact is, Sir, I want to make an old family—leastways, the beginning of one." He spoke as though the "old family" was a manufactured article, to

be designed with care and executed with skill. After a momentary pause he added, in a deliberate matter-of-fact way, "There are many ways of doing it—some is made of blood, and some is made of money. Now, my blood's as good as any in the county, the only difference is that it has been poured for ages through wessels of clay, and theirs has been circulating through wessels of fine china, that's been more ornamental than useful, and that's been kept for generations without a crack and without a flaw."

"Not always," said Mr. Brookland, smiling at his quaint simile; "but go on."

"Well, we've lived on this land, father and son, nigh upon a hundred and fifty years, and nobody can accuse a Nutford of saying or doing a mean or a wrong thing. Though our hands are dirty, we've kept our conscience clean. Now, we've always been a rough lot, we Nutfords, and I think it's time we began to polish up a bit, and grow into ladies and gentlemen. Look at my children, they are good stock to begin with. No offence to you, but I'd rather be the first of a brave, strong stock, than the feeble fag end of an old one."

"But, you see, we have no choice, we can neither choose our own time for coming into the world, nor the fathers who have gone before us," replied Mr. Brookland, amazed, as well as amused, at the old man's strange fancy, that seemed almost like a mania.

"That's true, Sir, or mine mightn't ha' chosen me; but I done my best for 'em, and they're not ashamed of me, thank God. Sometimes," he added, his rugged face wrinkling all over with pleasure, "I even think my Lucy's proud of me, bless her! and I know I'm mighty proud of her. Whiles I fancy I've no right to be the owner of such a pretty cretur'; for she's as fine a bit of flesh as any lady in the land, and she's got a heart to match. Folks may think me a fool—perhaps I am; but I can sit for hours, smoking my pipe quietly, fancying myself lying in the churchyard yonder, with my children's children's pattering feet above my head, reading what's writ upon my tombstone, and prattling about the old man that's dead and gone. Who knows they may grow up into fine ladies and gentlemen, and perhaps sit in the house of Parliament—M.P.'s for Cornwall, and bring

their grand friends down here, and point to my grave, and say, 'He made us what we are.' Why, they might christen their houses after me—there may be 'Nutford Willas,' 'Nutford Arms,' or even 'Nutford Town.' Stranger things than that have come to pass. Sir Bernard Burke, the King of Ulster, has writ a good deal about families, and I've read all he's wrote about 'em, and some of the best and highest have sprung from worse stock than mine."

So it seemed the old man had got a romance in his heart, and he was working it out by the labour of his life. The one firmly-fixed idea in his mind was the advancement of his family to a better and higher position than his own. He was making out already a debtor and creditor account between himself and an unborn posterity. He levied a tax upon their gratitude, to be paid from the lofty living to the lowly dead. He knew little of human nature; he thought that those who rise high in the world's esteem, and win for themselves fame and station, will look back with pride to their lowly origin, and glorify the name of their humble forefathers. He never thought a man could blush for the honourable poverty of an ancestor, whose hand was stained with labour, but unsoiled with wrong. Luckily the dead know nothing either of the good or evil that comes after them. They are bound in their grave-clothes, deaf, blind, and still. The ingratitude or dishonour that would have fired the warm blood, or crushed the living heart, falls harmlessly upon the dead.

To Mr. Brookland Mr. Nutford presented a new phase of character; he seemed to be laying out his plans for future generations in the most business-like manner. Most men sow in the hope of reaping, but he was content to sow the seed when he could never hope to live to see it springing. He would be in his grave ages before the reaping-time had come. However, he laboured under a harmless delusion, which gave occupation to his thoughts, and hope and comfort to his declining years. All his thoughts, hopes, and wishes seemed to be absorbed by the one idea. Mr. Brookland smiled to himself at the folly of it, but he had no desire—no right to disturb the old man's faith in the mythical future.

"Now, Sir, I told you what I got at heart, and if you can

do anything to for'ard my boy in the world, I shall be ever gratefully yours."

Mr. Brookland told him that he should spend nearly the whole of the two following months in town, where he hoped to make the young artist's acquaintance, and he would do anything and everything in his power to advance his prospects, adding—

"I have already a high opinion of his genius from the rough specimens I see of it here."

He then proceeded to cheer the old man with pleasant anecdotes of men who had risen, even in his time, to fame and fortune by the pure force of industry and genius; and of many others who have occupied high positions both in Church and State, and who have owed their origin to a more obscure source than Mr. Nutford's was. But he found he told nothing new. Mr. Nutford was well up in the subject; the history of the Peerage was his favourite, indeed his only literary study.

Lucy, meanwhile, had carried her friend off to have a private chat. Then they went in search of Mrs. Nutford, whom they found engaged in a large store-room, solemnly laying aside the linen in the different presses, scattering sweet lavender among their pure white folds. She smiled, seemed grimly glad to see Margaret, and welcomed her as genially as it was in her nature to welcome anybody. She was lavish in her offers of hospitality. When she discovered that Margaret had no intention of staying at the farm, she insisted upon their remaining to have some tea, and ordered that luxury, cream-cakes, and other small delicacies, to be prepared immediately, saying, with apologetic severity—

"You will excuse our humbleness. I daresay it is what you are not accustomed to—not that there's any call for apologies; the blessed Apostles were humble and content, and so are we. Luxuries is bad for the soul as well as for the body. I would not be richer if I could."

"Evidently your mind is well stored with Scriptural texts," said Margaret. "You remember that special one, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God?'"

Mrs. Nutford did not choose that anybody should be

Scripture-wise but herself, and rather snubbed Margaret's attempt, saying—

"I don't take no account of that story of the camel; there's a many ways of understanding it, and your way mayn't be mine. However, it's no use tempting Providence."

In this sentiment Margaret demurely agreed. Then Lucy carried her off to her own room to exhibit her treasures, and introduce her to a delightful little cosy nook next to her own, "the spare room," which was arranged with simple, fairy-like elegance, and gave out upon an extensive prospect of picturesque home-scenery.

"This will be your room when you come to stay with us," said Lucy, "and I hope that will be soon. We shall have a delightful time together."

Margaret said she doubted if her father would at any time allow her to prolong her visit beyond a day.

"Oh! nonsense," replied Lucy. "I manage my own dear old father, and I shall try to manage yours." She paused a second, then added quickly, "unless you do not wish to come."

"Lucy!" exclaimed Margaret reproachfully.

"I thought you might be afraid of my stepmother, dear, for I own she is rather alarming at first, but there really is no harm in her. She likes to feel that she is walking on the sunny side of grace, while we, poor souls, are shivering in the shade. She is generous, though, and will throw us crumbs of spiritual food, as we scatter grains to the chickens. She fancies she is fattening us for grace. I regard her in the light of a pilot engine clearing the way for us to follow; if we do run off the line it will be no fault of hers."

"It is to be hoped she will arrive safe herself," said Margaret.

"Oh! there is no fear of that; her machinery is well oiled, and the steam is always up."

The time was flying fast; they were summoned down to tea. Mrs. Nutford appeared at that social repast in solemn state, dressed in her best black silk. Her presence did not add to the genial enjoyment of the company, but rather diminished it. She thought it was her duty to give to all conversations a seasoning of sacred sayings, with wordy

illustrations of her own. Sometimes, like many wiser people, she gave too many and too much. The very tea and coffee seemed weakened by her pious and watery phrases, and the toast and cream-cakes were saturated with the odour of sanctity.

As soon as tea was over, the girls went out into the porch and sat down, chatting and buzzing among the flowers that Lucy had tossed aside at her approach. Margaret inquired what she could be doing with such an unusual lot of flowers ; was she preparing for a *fête* ?

“Yes,” replied Lucy, “for a matrimonial *fête*. Our rector’s daughter is to be married to-morrow, and these are to decorate the altar and the church.”

The carriage was ready, and it was time for them to go ; but before they parted, a day was fixed for Margaret to pay another visit to the farm—she was to drive over quite early in the morning, and remain till late in the evening, and they were to make a long excursion to examine some curious remains, and visit some particular spots which were remarkable for their beauty. Mr. and Miss Brookland returned home, well satisfied with their visit. Lucy stood watching them till the carriage was out of sight.





CHAPTER X.

FAMILY JARS.

“Dissensions, like small streams at first begun,
Unseen they rise, but gather as they run.”



MARGARET fancied she had never spent a happier week than that she passed in Cornwall. There was almost daily communication between Penzance and Rose Vale Farm. Mr. Brookland would sometimes drive over with Margaret early in the morning, and leave her there to spend the day with Lucy; while he went wandering over the hills, or sometimes down to the sea-shore, which was about a mile distant, in search of botanical or geological specimens. He was a silent, thoughtful man, and everything that was beautiful or curious in nature had an interest for him. Anxious as he was to indulge Margaret's many little whims and fancies, and liberal as were the Nutfords in their hospitable invitations, he could not have passed a day at Rose Vale without feeling considerably *ennuyé*. Indeed, he felt he should be entirely out of place, therefore he rarely remained there beyond an hour. During that time he enjoyed the conversation and quaint humour of Mr. Nutford, from whom he also obtained some useful scraps of information on agricultural matters; for that man must be ignorant indeed from whom we can learn nothing.

The affection that existed between Lucy and Margaret seemed to increase as the days wore on. They fluttered

about the house chatting and chirping like happy birds as they were. Margaret was made familiar with every nook and corner of it, from the cool pleasant dairy, with its rows of golden butter and bright pans of luscious cream, to the lumber loft in the roof, from the small square window of which they had a splendid view of the country for miles round. This had been one of Lucy's favourite childish haunts, and many a pleasant memory was connected therewith; it was there, where they were most free from interruption, that she and her brother used to hie away from the rest of the household, and frighten themselves to death with ghost stories, or play at hide-and-seek among the used-up furniture and odds and ends of lumber that had accumulated largely during the lapse of years. Sometimes they built castles in the air, and laid out the pleasure-grounds that were to be trodden in the years to come. All these and many other details of her early years Lucy confided to Margaret. They had mutually agreed to travel back over their past lives, to exchange confidences and compare notes, to see how far their thoughts and feelings were alike, and in how many ways their two lives had run parallel to each other. Margaret had no childish exploits with brother or sister to relate; no school-days, full of small experiences, small pains and pleasures (with the welcome holidays scattered in between), when the varied qualities of human nature come out in faint colours, all mingling together at one time harmoniously, at another discordantly clashing and creating a world that is a miniature of the great world which lies beyond the play-ground walls. She was the petted child of fortune. All troubles and chequered things had been kept out of her life; nurses, governesses, and servants had surrounded her in her earlier years, and now that she had grown older, and enjoyed the pleasures of society, she had plenty of such friends and acquaintances as society gives, but she had never had the familiar companionship of those of her own age; no castle-building, or story-telling in the dark, no childish "school-scrapes," that create such pleasant laughter as we look back upon them. She had nothing of these experiences to tell her friend, whose life had been full of them. As she listened to Lucy's pleasant reminiscences, she almost envied her

the dear brother who had evidently mingled with all her merry past, for his name was frequently flung forth upon the spray and sparkle of the gay, pleasant talk that fell from her careless lips. That beloved castle-building brother was the darling of Lucy's heart.

"I should like you to see him, Margaret," she said. "Dear Claude! he is quite a genius; they say he will be world-famous one day. Oh! dear me, I wish I was a man. We two used to sit here in the bright summer days building castles in the air—mine have all vanished long ago, but he is marching on to take possession of his, the 'temple of fame,' he called it, and he will win it, too. I am not satisfied with my sex, Margaret—we women seem such useless creatures; we can win nothing for ourselves."

"I do not know about that," said Margaret, who was perfectly content with her womanhood and its attendant graces; "there is one thing that the bravest, strongest, or cleverest man in all the world cannot win for us, or take away when we have won it for ourselves."

"Oh! you mean love," said Lucy, carelessly; "but even there we are powerless; we cannot go out into the world, and win even love for ourselves."

"How do we get on, then?" smiled Margaret; "for certainly we cannot gain that by proxy—no other person can win that article for us."

"There is very little of the real unadulterated article going," replied Lucy; "and then the right people often do not get the right thing. A man can go out into the world and seek for what he wants, and try to win it, too; no woman is too fair, too rich, or too beautiful, but every fool may try his fortune with her."

"And fail —" rejoined Margaret, "as any fool would who tried his fortune with you or me, Lucy."

"Still they have a chance, and we have none; *we* must sit at home by the fireside, and take what Fate or accident may send us, or perhaps fall by a random shot after all. As I said before, Margaret, I wish I was a man. I would go to London and take chambers with my brother Claude; we would both march on shoulder to shoulder, and win fame together."

"As you are a woman, you will do a much better thing,"

said Margaret. "You will stay at home, let him do all the work, while you reap half the honours ; for I am sure you will be prouder of the fame he wins than if you had won it for yourself."

"I do not know that," replied Lucy. "I sometimes fancy I am getting dissatisfied with everything."

"I only wonder how you can be dissatisfied with anything, in such a beautiful home as this," said Margaret. "Why, it is a perfect paradise."

"Oh ! I love my home dearly—do not think for a moment that I am not satisfied with that ; but it is not places, it is people, who help to make our lives happy ; and sometimes I feel very lonely ; for apart from my dear old father, there is not a soul in this place I care for. When Claude was at home, things were different."

"But, Lucy, dear, a girl like you must surely have plenty of companions and friends !" exclaimed Margaret, surprised at the little symptoms of discontent that passed out from among Lucy's simple words.

"So I had in my school-days ; but they are past. Now I have really no friend in the world but you, Margaret ; the few girls in this neighbourhood with whom I should care to associate, would not associate with me. It is no use talking, dear," she added, impatiently, as a flush, half pride, half shame, suffused her cheeks, "education may be a very good thing in its way, when all its surroundings are in harmony, but it has totally unfitted me for the society of people of my own rank. You see, I am not proud," she added, as a smile curled her lip—"I confess I belong to the inferior order of beings."

"You confess no such thing," said Margaret, caressingly ; "besides, I do not care what your education has done to unfit you for other people, it has exactly fitted you for me ; those who do not care for you as you deserve, have very bad taste, and are not worthy of you. See how proud your father is of you !"

"Dear father," said Lucy, with loving tones ; "but he is so blind, he thinks other people see me with his eyes. He does not observe the absurd condescension with which some of the small gentry treat me. They shake hands with me and say, 'How do you do, Miss Nutford?' and ask me

impertinent questions, as though they were doing me a favour. I am obliged to bear it, for the dear old dad stands by looking so pleased, and singing my praises, as though he were appraising a piece of furniture, and they were going to buy. They are so different to you, with your large heart and noble spirit, Margaret. What shall I do when you are gone?—how sadly I shall miss you!”

“Your father has promised to let you come and stay with us at Brooklands; and I hope to persuade him to let you go back with us.”

During this brief conversation, Margaret caught a glimpse into Lucy's inner life, and discovered that it was not all sunshine. Even in that rural paradise the trail of the serpent had left its slime upon the leaves and flowers. The spirit of discontent was at work in Lucy's breast, spreading its bitter poison among her sweetest feelings, and weighing down her lightest thoughts. Her superior training and gentle breeding had rendered her unfit for the society of her rough, untaught neighbours, among whom only she could look for free, familiar intercourse. They were jealous of her delicate grace and beauty, and ridiculed those accomplishments of which her father was so proud. Lucy knew this well enough, and therefore went very little among the friendly society and gossiping coteries in the neighbourhood. There was another thing that vexed her sadly: her father was in the habit of spending the evenings of market days at the “Red Lion Inn,” down in the town, and she knew that on such occasions he could not resist the temptation to expound his views and intentions respecting the future; and then the prospects and perfections of his children entered largely into the discussion. Whispers of this had reached Lucy's ears, and she had heard of many a sly joke at her own expense. All this irritated and annoyed her sadly, but this part of her grievance she did not impart to Margaret.

The day before Mr. and Miss Brookland were to leave Cornwall, they had promised to spend at Rose Vale. Mr. Brookland was going to ride over the farm, and inspect the different breeds of cattle and sheep, returning in the evening to take tea in the best parlour with the mistress of the house, whom, as a rule, he scrupulously avoided; for whenever there had been a talk of his remaining to tea, she bore down

upon him in her rustling black silk and silver tea-pot, and so effectually scared him away. However, for once, as it was the last day of his visit, he resigned himself to his fate.

The girls passed the day as usual. There had been some talk of Lucy's accompanying them home to Brooklands, but the matter was not decided, the old farmer being averse to parting with her; but they were going to attack him in full force in the evening, when they hoped to carry their point.

Mr. Brookland made his appearance punctually at the hour appointed. The table was laid out with unusual care, and furnished with the very best the house afforded. Mrs. Nutford was seated in solemn state to receive him. She had been labouring under great excitement all day, for it was at her express invitation he had come. She considered him as her particular guest, and was anxious to receive him with all honours. She shook out her skirt and smoothed her cap-strings for the twentieth time when she heard his footstep on the gravel. Then she went out to meet him, and welcomed him with grim cordiality.

"I'm sure, Sir, when we first met among them miserable mountains, I little thought I should have the honour of seeing you seated here in my humble home; not that I need talk of humbleness after all the miseries we went through, and called it pleasure; for what with sour bread, as our very pigs would turn their noses up at, and them nasty musky-toes, I wonder I'm alive."

Mr. Nutford, who followed his guest into the room, laughed heartily at his wife's reminiscences of their travels. He rubbed his hands gleefully together, as though chuckling at some well-remembered joke. He positively almost winked at the stately lady, and screwed up his eyes till they seemed to disappear in his head. Then he apologised, and gave an explanatory nod at Mr. Brookland, saying,—

"The old lady didn't relish the mosquitoes."

"But the muskytoes relished me," she answered, with a reproachful air; "I thought they'd have eaten me up; and it's all owing to a merciful Providence I'm alive now—no thanks to you, Mr. Nutford."

There was evidently some matrimonial mystery connected with these mosquitoes, which ought to have covered the old

man with confusion, instead of rousing his laughter. There are few things more unpleasant to a third party than being a forced witness to a domestic jar even of the lightest kind. Hence well-bred people generally arrange their little squabbles privately. The walls of many a gay chamber bear witness to scenes where

“The proud one confronted the cruel,
And loud and bitter the quarrel arose,
Fierce and merciless—one of those
With spoken daggers, and looks like blows,
In all but the bloodshed—a duel!”

The actors in such scenes will come forth from their chamber, and go out into the world with soft words and silvery smiles, hiding the bruised spirit (perhaps the bruised flesh! who knows?—we have heard of such things even in our civilised times) beneath silken folds and glittering jewels, that flash cruelly in the eyes, and weigh heavily on the heart of the wearer. But people less educated find a barbarous pleasure in dragging forth their domestic grievances, and parading them before their friends and acquaintances. They seem to enjoy a squabble all the more from having witnesses, perhaps they like to exhibit their skill, and show which tongue can give the roughest lick, or leave the sharpest sting in the breast of the other. They do not care to have any privacy in their lives; or, if a pair are driven into a matrimonial broil in the seclusion of their own chamber, they will each take fifty friends into their confidence within an hour. Mrs. Nutford was one of this kind. She rarely lost an opportunity of giving her husband a quiet rub the wrong way. Perhaps she fancied that her superior wisdom shone out more brightly beside his genial and pleasant folly.

Mr. Brookland saw that she was inclined to make him the confidante of some adventure, or misadventure, that diverted her husband, though it wounded her. He therefore hastened to change the conversation, remarking on the hospitality they had extended to Margaret, and trusting she had not intruded too much upon their kindness; but he said,—

“The charming society of your daughter has been such a pleasure and such an acquisition to her, that I had not the

courage to limit her visits, while you were unlimited in your invitation."

"Indeed, Sir, Miss Brookland's been quite a godsend to my girl," said Mr. Nutford, gratefully. "You wouldn't think it, Sir, seein' her lookin' so bright and happy like, but she've been given to moping for the last six months."

"That's easily 'counted for." Mrs. Nutford threw in the words with a satisfied jerk.

"Some wise folk 'll account easy for things as 'ud puzzle God-amighty to tell on," replied the old man, shooting a sharp, stern glance from under his bent brows. "Sometimes, Sir," he added, "I think she wants finer friends than we can find for her hereabouts—not that she's proud, bless her ——"

"I can quite understand Miss Nutford being lonely here—she must necessarily be superior to such neighbours as have not had her advantages, and I should imagine they were not a few."

"You are right there, Sir," chuckled the fond father, proudly; "she is superior to most people, and a good girl, too, a very good girl is Lucy."

"Only too much given to vanity," added his wife.

"And I wouldn't give a fig for a woman as wasn't; it's a part of their natur, and Lucy's a good specimen of her species. 'Taint exactly vanity either, for she'll dress herself pretty and smart when there's nobody but scarecrows to look at her."

"There's a many different sorts of vanities," rejoined Mrs. Nutford, "and some folks takes a wicked pride in looking at themselves, forgetting that all flesh is grass, and they are only whited sepulchres the best of 'em. For my part, I think as looking-glasses was an invention of Satan. I don't encourage 'em."

"No," replied her husband; "we old folks don't want to look at our ugly mugs. If we wur as young and as pretty as Lucy is, I daresay we'd take a sly peep now and then."

"You're ridikerlous mad about that girl, and you'll be the ruin of her body and soul, that'll be the end on it. However, I do all I can; I give her my prayers."

"They ain't worth much, or you'd be more sparin' on 'em," growled Mr. Nutford impatiently.

Without heeding the interruption, his wife added severely, "And I trust in Providence they'll be heard."

"It's to be hoped as Providence has got something better to do than to listen to all the crack-brained nonsense which silly folks call prayers. If it hasn't, I pity it, that's all."

"I wouldn't expose my heathenishness, if I was you. There's some folks as do believe in a Providence, though things do go contrary-wise."

"I'll tell you what, Betsy," said the old man, attempting to be facetious, "if they were shut up with you for a week, they'd be tempted to doubt it."

While the matrimonial duet was going on, Mr. Brookland walked to the bookshelves, and busied himself in inspecting Lucy's library. Among other things, he found a *Life of Mozart*. On the fly-leaf was written—"Lucy Nutford : presented to her for her proficiency in music."

"Ah! I see your daughter is musical," he said; "and music, I think, is one of the most charming of accomplishments; delightful to yourself and agreeable to others."

"Well, Sir, there's opinions about that. For my part, I can't abide music, excepting a big drum—that sounds military; but when I hear those brazen instruments blown by living wind-bags, and fiddlers torturing that unfortunate catgut—as I ain't sure has lost its feeling: it squeaks so—I feel as though they were a-scraping my own inside. Music is the only thing Lucy and me don't run all fours upon. I make a dead stand agin it. No, no, I says, no pianners in my house. If you want music, play a tune upon your milk-pails."

"I wonder where them gals can be!" exclaimed Mrs. Nutford, who had disappeared for a moment, and now returned, followed by a farm-servant bringing in tea, coffee, and all the dainties of the dairy and oven, which had been prepared under her, Mrs. Nutford's, own superintendence. "You'll excuse my calling Miss Brookland a gal, but being Lucy's friend, I take that liberty."

Mr. Brookland felt fidgety and uncomfortable—he had returned from his ramble too soon. If he had known that Margaret and Lucy had been out, he would not have entered the house till their return. He was a man of few words at

any time, and he found it quite impossible to maintain anything like a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Nutford, for she was sure to throw in some discordant element that ended in a domestic duet that was not pleasant to his ears. One thing was evident to him, that Mr. Nutford's son and daughter were held sacred from any open attack from his wife's rebellious tongue. Once she attempted to sneer at the boy's genius, but a thunder-cloud darkened the old man's brow, and the words died away as they left her lips. If Lucy's name was mentioned ever so slightly he watched over it with jealous care; that was a thing not to be trifled with.

Mr. Brookland steered clear of those subjects, perhaps the only ones that would have interested his host and himself also, inasmuch as Lucy was Margaret's friend, and he had promised that he would take the boy under his kindly patronage. However, he and Mr. Nutford had a characteristic discourse upon the subject of a fine young Alderney whom he had been allowed to treat homœopathically; but that subject was soon exhausted, and feeling the irksomeness of his position, he was just proposing to go in search of the young ladies, when they entered the house, looking tired and jaded, as though they had overexerted themselves.

"I am afraid we have kept tea waiting, father, dear," said Lucy languidly; "but the afternoon was so lovely, and being Margaret's last day, we wandered on and on till we were tired out, forgetting we had to come back again. I do not know how many times we have rested on our way home."

"Oh! but we have had such a beautiful ramble," said Margaret brightly, "and I have enjoyed it so much. I do not believe I have ever walked so many miles before. I wish you had been with us, papa; we have seen the dearest old house, with such a magnificent prospect!"

"Where is it you have taken Miss Brookland, Lucy?" inquired Mr. Nutford.

"Oh! we went through the wood, across the six-gate fields, and home by the road," replied Lucy.

"I didn't ask you which way you went, but where you went, my dear," said Mr. Nutford, emphatically.

"Well, father," answered Lucy, with flushed cheeks and a sort of defiant tone in her voice, "I took her to Haylewood. I thought she would like to see the house."

At the mention of the word *Haylewood* Mrs. Nutford gave a sort of satisfied grunt, cast her eyes up to the ceiling, jerked the teapot, and upset a cup of tea in her lap; and Mr. Nutford said kindly, but gravely,—

"I am sorry you went there, my gal; it is a bad way for you—a very bad way."

"We thought it beautiful," said Margaret, sipping her cup of coffee with evident relish, and remaining blind to the external signs of confusion round her, "and I wouldn't have missed seeing that old house for the world. It is uninhabited, too, and there's a story connected with it, but Lucy was too tired to tell it to me."

"I wonder if it is the same house that attracted my attention in one of my peregrinations?" exclaimed Mr. Brookland. "It stands on the brow of a gentle hill, with an extensive pinewood to the right, and a magnificent view of the sea. I remember I was remarkably struck with it, and I think, as you say, it bore the appearance of being deserted."

"Yes, that must be the very same!" exclaimed Margaret. "Now for the story, Lucy!"

"I am not in the humour for story-telling, dear," said Lucy, stirring her tea vigorously—"besides, I am tired."

"Well, then, you had no business to say there was a story, if you did not mean to tell it. I will not have my curiosity roused for nothing. Now, Mr. Nutford, if Lucy will not tell it, you must. I hope it is a ghost-story; we have got a beautiful ghost at Brooklands."

"It isn't much of a story, Miss, and it's nothing to do with ghosts," replied Mr. Nutford—"it's only about the misfortins of a misfortunate family."

"You had better give things their right names, and say crimes!" exclaimed Mrs. Nutford sharply. "If he'd had the fear of the Lord before his eyes, such things could never have happened."

"I call things by the best name I can. I like to let a fellow-creetur fall easy, for I wouldn't hit a man when he's down wi' my tongue no mor'n I would wi' my fists."

Having delivered this wholesome rebuke to his wife, he continued his address to Mr. Brookland :—

“Fact is, Sir, that house belonged to one of the oldest families in the county, and the last owner on it—leastways, him as was the last owner—is now suffering penal servitude, he having put himself within the clutches of the law.”

“A gentleman!—and of good family, you say?” exclaimed Mr. Brookland, shocked as well as interested.

“Ay, Sir, it’s true, more’s the pity. I don’t like to see the canker eating away the honour of an old family, no mor’n I like to see the rot at the root of an old tree. He was a liberal gentleman, too, and did many a kind act when starvation and sorrow was among the poor. Well, Sir, he was going to his grave with honourable grey hairs, respected by all the county, when they say he did that what he’s now suffering for; but I never believed he was more nor *half* guilty.”

“I suppose you don’t set yourself up as cleverer than the lawyers?” exclaimed Mrs. Nutford. “I wouldn’t rail against the laws of my country, if I was you, as though they had punished an innocent man.”

“The Lord forbid I should say that!” he answered. “No, in this country an innocent man cannot suffer, but many a guilty one may escape.”

“What was this unfortunate gentleman’s offence?”

“Well, Sir, he spekerlated, and was unfortunate. He lost a sight o’ money, through banks busting, and one thing and another. Then to keep things from flaring out upon the world, he made free wi’ some trust money as belonged to a young lady as he was guardian to—that’s how it was, Sir; but he meant to pay it back, every farden, as soon as things turned round; and so he would, but some scoundrel, I believe, some serpent he had warmed in his own bosom, turned round and stung him—not openly, but in secret. He wrote ’nonymous letters and woke up the suspicions of the lady’s legal advisers. They set the law upon his track, and the poor old man was hunted down. Folks say as the whole place was drowned in tears when he was took away. He was born in that house, and so was his father before him. Lord, Sir, what he must ha’ felt, as he turned his back upon the old home, and tottered away, knowin’ he’d left disgrace

upon the dead who had gone before, and on the livin' as come after him. Well, God mend us all, I say ! He's gone to hide his grey hairs and his breakin' heart in the four stone walls of a prison ; and when I think on him, wi' all his grand proud ways come down to that, I could almost break my own. There's no accounting for sympathy, Sir, for I didn't know much on him, not being thrown in his way. I suppose being an old man like myself, I feel more for him."

"But what became of that horrid man who betrayed him?" asked Margaret.

"My father can only say what he thinks, not what he knows," exclaimed Lucy. "No one can tell how or by whom he was betrayed, or if he was betrayed at all—it is conjecture only."

"I know two and two makes four," rejoined Mr. Nutford, "and I'm equally sure as he that's most guilty in God's eyes escaped free, wi' the thanks of an honourable jury for his testimony. But he's made himself scarce in Cornwall."

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Nutford, "he'll come back again some day ; for he was a pleasant-spoken, handsome gentleman, and a great favourite with some people, and in spite of the cross you've put upon his name, I know them as would jump into his arms and marry him to-morrow."

"It's a lie !" thundered the old man, letting his hand fall heavily upon the table, while his eyes positively blazed with anger. His sudden outburst almost electrified all present. "No honest girl would hold to such a man. My curse and the curse of God ——"

"Father ! father !" exclaimed Lucy, springing forward and catching his arm, "remember curses are like chickens, they come home to roost !" The next moment her arms were thrown round his neck, and she was sobbing violently on his breast. Her exclamation seemed to cool his wrath almost as quickly as it had risen.

"You're right, my gal, you're right, I've no business to curse any of God's creatures. There, there, don't cry, don't be frightened. I beg your pardon, Sir, I beg everybody's pardon for so forgetting of myself. I'm a passionate old fool, and there's some things I can't abide to think on."

"They say we are all mad upon some points," said Mr. Brookland, "and in this case I am sure your sympathy with

the unfortunate man, and your indignation at even an imaginary traitor, does credit to your kind heart."

"Everybody as knowed Mr. Treherne, Sir, felt the same."

"Treherne—Treherne!" exclaimed Mr. Brookland, reflectively, "I think I remember something of the case—he had a son who ——"

"He had, Sir, and a fine noble fellow he was, though I never seen him," replied Mr. Nutford. "As soon as he found how things was at home, he come down to Cornwall and comforted the old man, and kep' always nigh him, so as no pryin' cruel creturs should throw their dirty scoffs at him in his trouble; never speakin' an unkind word, but cheerin' him, and carin' more for him than ever. When it was all over, and sentence passed, what does he do? Why, he cuts off the entail, sells the property he had from his mother's side, and pays back the trust money; and gives up every shillin' to his father's creditors, and throws his-self upon the world a beggar! But wherever he is, Sir, the Lord's blessing'll go with him."

"A noble act!" said Mr. Brookland, highly gratified; "there came out a spice of the true honourable blood."

"Yes, Sir," returned Mr. Nutford, "I suppose there is something in the breed of men, same as the breed of cattle; them as is poorly born and bred, educational and otherwise, wi' water-gruel for the mind as well as for the body—and that don't fatten fine feelins—they aint got the same sort of sperit as the others have. But 'tain't their fault, poor things, everybody would be born a gentleman if they could, though it isn't every gentleman as acts accordingly. Not many 'ud ha' done what young Mr. Treherne have."

"I believe there are thousands," said Mr. Brookland.

"Well, I should like to have the honour of their acquaintance, that's all," replied Mr. Nutford, looking as though he did not believe it.

"So should I," rejoined Mr. Brookland; "and rest assured, if it is ever my good fortune to meet young Mr. Treherne, I will stretch out my hand to help him forward in the world."

They two supported the conversation almost entirely for the rest of that social meal. Mr. Nutford's momentary outburst had startled the ladies, and effectually damped their

spirits. His wife drew herself up with insulted dignity, and never deigned to speak a word either in answer or remark. When Margaret saw how much Lucy was affected, though it was but for a moment, she could have been her companion in tears. She felt vexed with herself, as having been partly the occasion of the awkward *contresens*. If it had not been for her persistent inquiries, it could not have occurred. She took advantage of the first opportunity to say to Lucy,—

“I am afraid my stupid questions caused all your annoyance, Lucy, dear. I am so sorry. I had no idea the affair was at all connected with your family matters, or of course I should never have mentioned it.”

“Nor has it even the remotest connexion with us,” replied Lucy; “pray do not think that, Margaret; only I do not like to see my father prejudiced or unjust, and to my thinking he has always judged unfairly of this matter. But do not let us talk any more about that,” she added, with an evident wish to avoid the subject. “Is it quite decided that you go to-morrow?”

“Yes, quite; and I hope we shall be allowed to carry you off with us,” replied Margaret. “I have asked my papa to try all his eloquence with yours, and I believe he has already marched to the attack. Look!—how earnestly they are talking—it can be about nothing else.”

Lucy glanced in the direction Margaret indicated, and saw Mr. Brookland in deep conversation with her father; and she knew the latter was greatly perplexed by the way he fidgeted with his hands, and kept his eyes upon the ground.

“I do hope I may go with you, Margaret!” exclaimed Lucy, anxiously; “for I shall be sorely sick at heart when you leave me. I seem to have awakened to another sense of life since I have known you.”

At this moment Mr. Brookland looked up, and seeing the two girls, beckoned them towards him. They were not slow to obey his invitation.

“Well, Miss Nutford,” he began.

“Call me Lucy, or I will not listen to you.”

“Lucy, then, I have been persuading your father to give you into my keeping for a month, and have promised to keep faithful watch and ward over you. I have shown him better reason for your going than he can bring forward for

your staying, and I think I have won the battle, though it was a hard fight."

The old man looked with yearning eyes upon his daughter's face. He took it between his two hands, and a world of love welled into his eyes and softened his rugged features as he looked upon her young fair face.

"Would you like to go, my pet?" he asked.

"Yes, father, I should," she answered, honestly; "if you would not think it unkind of me to leave you."

"I—I won't be selfish, my dear; though the Lord knows how I shall miss the sight o' your face. I'm only a rough old man, darling, and I musn't think what's pleasantest to myself, but what's best for you."

"I may go, then?" said Lucy, showing by her heightening looks how eager she was to be gone.

"Ay, child, ay, you can go," and away the two girls tripped, delighted with the easily obtained permission.

A cloud gathered over the farmer's face as his eye followed them, till they were out of sight. Then with a smothered sigh, and a grim attempt to smile, he turned to Mr Brookland, saying,—

"Talk of a thing being the apple of one's eye, Sir,—why, that gal is the core of my heart." They walked slowly towards the house, and after a moment's pause he added, "You won't let anybody look down upon her, Sir, for she's a lady bred, though not a lady born. Don't think nothin' of me neither, Sir, for I know my place, and your kindness to her won't make me forget it. I trust her to to you, and wherever she is, I shall never come nigh her to disgrace her."

"That you could never do!" exclaimed Mr. Brookland, stopping in the path, and shaking the old man's hand with honest hearty warmth. "However homely your language or your life, you are one of nature's true gentlemen—she makes many counterfeits. I consider your acquaintance a credit to any man, and I should only be too glad to return your hospitality at Brooklands."

They took their departure early in the evening, as there were many little matters to be attended to between that and the morrow.

On Lucy's return to the house, she at once proceeded to

make her preparations and informed Mrs. Nutford of the plans for the next day. Mrs. Nutford seemed greatly scandalised at Lucy's going.

"Well, I should like to see the end of it—that's all," she said. "I never knowed any good come of gaddin' yet, and I hope you'll never repent it, Lucy. You remember what came of Jane Allwright, as broke her father's heart, and is now lying on the parish ——"

"What on earth has Jane Allright to do with me?" exclaimed Lucy.

"There, you needn't fly out in them dreadful passions," continued her stepmother; "it's quite enough for one in the family to be so afflicted."

"I do believe you grudge me every happy moment of my life," said Lucy impatiently.

"Nobody was never meant to be happy in this world, or the Lord would have made it otherwise. Look at me! I'm not happy, for when I've no troubles of my own, I'm worried with other people's—and as for work, my hands are full of it. What with one thing and another, I've got no time even for my own salvation. But there, my dear, I don't want to say anything unpleasant just as you are going away. I know your father thinks I'm hard on you, but frivolousness and folly I can't abide, and I must say this, Miss Brookland is a poor giddy-pated butterfly, as 'll never lead you in the way of grace."

Lucy was determined not to allow herself to be provoked on this her last day at home, for a time at least; she held her peace, and went quietly on with preparations for her departure. Presently Mrs. Nutford resumed—

"Lucy, dear, when you're in London you'll be sure to write and let me know how things go on."

"Brooklands is not London."

"That don't signify; I daresay you'll go there. They do say the ladies have left off crinoline, and nice draggle-tails they must look—but that's neither here nor there—fashion's one thing, becomingness another."

"Oh! of course I'll tell you all the news," said Lucy.

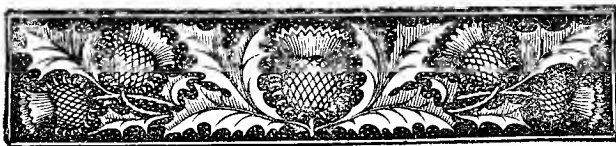
"Not that I want you to go on my account—for I don't approve of the morals or the manners of the place; it grows more heathenish than ever, for I have heard that the Christian

ministers hold forth in the play-houses, and are received with shouts of applause."

She would not listen to Lucy's explanation, that the Christy Minstrels, not ministers, were caterers for pleasure, not piety.

Mr. Nutford's voice was soon heard calling for Lucy, and she gladly obeyed his summons. Before they parted for the night, they paced up and down together, under the trees, alone and uninterrupted, for nearly an hour; and when their tongues were silent, their souls held sympathetic communion.





CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

“In companions
That do converse and waste the time together,
Whose souls do bear an equal yoke of love,
There needs must be a like perfection
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit.”



MARGARET was delighted to convey Lucy home to Brooklands. A long railway journey is always tedious, even in the brightest weather, and as a drizzling rain was falling all the day, and a white mist obscured their view of the picturesque country they were passing through, they found the journey doubly tedious; especially as the grave presence of Mr. Brookland restrained to a great extent the conversation of his young companions.

They did not chatter in their usual bird-like fashion, uttering their wonderings and wishes aloud, but sat demurely talking in a worldly-wise way. Some girls, indeed, the generality of them, do not “get on,” as they call it, in the presence of those in authority over them, especially if it be a parent, no matter how indulgent or sympathetic that parent may be. The years that have flown seem to set an impassable barrier between youth and age, no matter how great the love and sympathy between them, nor how closely the outer current of their lives may flow on together. They may be full of sweet confidences and holy affections, still, there are strange mysterious depths in the inner life of the

one which the other is never allowed to penetrate. We see this even on the surface of our constant experience of every-day life—in our intercourse with the rising generation. How often it happens that a group of young things will be gathered together, discussing their brief experiences, and filling the time with gay, pleasant chat, like the twitter of happy birds in the sunshine; but let an older, graver face (no matter how well beloved) enter the magic circle, and the spell is broken—a change sweeps over their merry faces, the smiles fade away imperceptibly, perhaps like the colours of a dissolving view, the voices are hushed, or give utterance to other music, and the jest is arrested on the lip. Despite of all courteous regard, we feel we are intruders. As the perigazied wistfully back when she was driven forth, and the gates of heaven were closed against her, so are we thrust forth from the paradise of youth. We may gaze yearningly over the imperceptible barrier that is felt, not seen, but we can never pass it; the precincts of youth are closed against us; Time stands at the portal, and separates us from the spiritual lives of our beloved as effectually as bolts of iron could separate our bodies. In vain we insist that the better part of us shall not die. We may strive to preserve our spirits, as some preserve their faces, and give to both the seeming of youth. Alas! it is but seeming. Our youth is dead—it will die, in spite of all endeavours; and if we strive to drag it on with us to the end, it is like thrusting the ghost of a dead past upon the living souls of the present. Every age has its pleasures, and it is sometimes difficult to say which is the greatest; but each must be content with its own. There is perhaps a little rebellion in our nature when we first feel the estrangement between ourselves and that sweet inner part of our children's lives, but we know it is inevitable, and those who are wise will retire with quiet grace, and take their places where Time has directed they should stand.

Mr. Brookland knew well enough that he was, to a certain extent, a bar to the free intercourse of the young things beside him; their light spirits were chained up in his presence. If he were not there, they would be let loose, to revel in a world of their own making, filled with rippling laughter, quaint fancies, or sweet girlish confidences. As it was, he

exerted himself to amuse them in the best way he could. He did not attempt to enter into the spirit of their young lives, but he told them anecdotes of things and people he had seen and known during his long career. He told these things so pleasantly, that he beguiled the journey of half its irksomeness. When he was tired, he closed his eyes, and leaned back in the carriage, sleeping, or pretending to sleep, a great part of the way. It was dusk when they arrived at Wycomb, the station nearest to Brooklands, where they found the carriage waiting. It was late in the evening when they reached home, and Margaret rejoiced aloud in the gloomy darkness of the night.

"I am glad it is dark, for I should not like you to catch the first glimpse of my dear old home through the evil auspices of a gloomy mist or drizzling shower," she said, as they rattled over the drawbridge, and alighted at the wide open, hospitable door.

Stepping in from that outer darkness, Lucy was almost dazzled by the light, luxury, and comfort that surrounded her on every side; for however dreary the outer world might be, within, Brooklands wore its brightest, cheeriest look, an unmistakable aspect of a wealthy, well-ordered household. There was no attempt at that ostentation so evident in the arrangements of men who are not to the "honour born," nor any ill-disguised endeavour to wear an appearance of rank to which neither the owner's dignity nor wealth entitled him. There was a fitting attendance of well-trained servants, quick of eye and neat of hand, ready to watch and administer to the oft unspoken wishes of their young mistress. Lucy was speedily relieved of her travelling wraps, and almost before she had time to look round her, or make a passing observation, she found herself being dragged along the picture-gallery by Margaret, who was in the highest possible spirits. Seeing that Lucy was occasionally inclined to pause before that pictured host which seemed to be gazing in a grim, ghostly fashion down on her, Margaret exclaimed, with fond impatience—

"Oh, come along, Lucy dear, I want to show you your room and mine; get dinner, or supper, as we had better call it, over, and then settle down for a nice cosy chat. You can look at those stupid old things to-morrow."

"Hush! do not talk in that light way, Margaret dear," said Lucy, laying her hand on Margaret's arm and arresting her steps, "I cannot tell you how the *coup-d'œil* of this place strikes me. I could stand here, looking at these grand old portraits of men who have lived and have perhaps walked to and fro in this very gallery, looking and feeling as we feel now, and fancy I heard their footsteps echoing still. I feel as though we ought to speak in hushed low voices, as we do in presence of the actual dead." Her voice changed, and there was a slight touch of bitterness in it as she added—"I suppose we all have ancestors of some sort, but it must be a grand thing to have had such ancestors as these."

"Yes, they are dear old things in their way," replied Margaret carelessly, "but you know, Lucy, they say 'familiarity breeds contempt,' and I know them all so well, their histories one by one, in an A B C fashion. I used to be bogeyed with that grim old fellow when I was a naughty child, and many a time I have lain trembling in my bed, fancying I heard him tramp, tramp, tramping up and down outside—my nursery was at the end of this gallery; I have never outgrown my dislike to him—I fancy he looks spitefully at me even now."

Lucy was half listening to her, half uttering her thoughts aloud.

"I can well understand Louis Napoleon's feelings. They say he may make France great, win battles, and make wise laws, do anything, almost everything; but he cannot create an ancient aristocracy. He may raise up a gilt gingerbread race, but he cannot coin the pure gold."

"Hush!" exclaimed Margaret, laying her fingers on her lips, with affected alarm, "not a word of Louis Napoleon, unless you would drive my father mad—he is rabid on that subject."

"Is he?" said Lucy, as they went slowly along, she using her eyes the while. "I should have thought he was too grave and wise to be rabid on any subject."

"Ah, that shows what terrible hypocrites we are," replied Margaret gravely. "I'm afraid we have all got hidden fire somewhere, that blazes away fiercely at certain times, and there's a general conflagration of all polite proprieties. If

you want to stir my father's fiery furnace, throw in a Radical covered with Parliamentary pitch plucked from Bright, Beales, and Company, and see how he'll blaze away."

Lucy laughed, and promised to throw in no such inflammable matter ; and as she cast her eyes about her, being deeply interested in all she saw, they rested on the sweet face of Blanche Brookland. She glanced from the picture dead to the living face beside her, and exclaimed wonderingly: "How like ! How very like ! Margaret, it is yourself !"

"Yes, the resemblance is striking," replied Margaret ; "I see it myself. Poor Aunt Blanche, it is lucky we did not both live together, or we should have to be labelled to know which was which."

"And that gentleman next her has a fine face," said Lucy, wandering on.

"Ah, that is our ghost ; I will tell you all about him by-and-by," lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper.

"A very pleasant-looking ghost. I should not be afraid to meet him, either in the flesh or in the spirit."

"There, positively you shall not look at another thing !" exclaimed Margaret, seeing she was still inclined to linger. "I see I must lead you along blindfold, or we shall be late for dinner. Punctuality is one of my papa's small virtues ; you don't know what an ogre he is if he is kept waiting." So saying, she threw a light scarf over Lucy's head, and led her lovingly along ; nor did she release her from that playful bondage till she had deposited her in the room she was to occupy during her visit at Brooklands.

"There, you may use your eyes now," she said, "provided you do not let your hands lie idle. This is your room, darling, and I mean you to be very happy in it."

Lucy looked round in pleased surprise, for she found herself in the most cosy little nest conceivable ; luxuriously comfortable and tastefully arranged. A bright wood fire was crackling in the grate, for though it was early summer, the evening was damp and chilly, and the genial light and warmth of the fire was grateful to the senses, and added not a little to the cheerful aspect of the room. A low luxurious couch was wheeled close to the fireside. Lucy's intelligent eye took in every feature of the room at a single glance,

"This is delightful, Margaret dear," she said. "I feel almost at home in it already."

"I am glad you like it; I could, of course, give you a larger, grander room, but I thought you would like to be near me."

"As of course I should."

"And this door leads direct to my dressing-room," added Margaret as she threw it open and showed Lucy her pretty boudoir-like dressing-room, with her bed-chamber beyond it. "I expect we shall have some cosy chats here together. But we must not stand talking here. I'll send my maid to help you to dress."

"What!" exclaimed Lucy, "that stately lady who followed us along the gallery? No, thank you, I am afraid I should be inclined to wait upon her, or shock her sense of propriety by showing how useful I can be to myself or to other people; but there, go along—you told me not to waste time, and there you stand, encouraging me to chatter as fast as I can."

She sent Margaret off, and in another moment was on her knees, turning the things over in her trunk, and selecting a dress that could be most easily and quickly arranged for the evening.

On entering the drawing-room they found Mr. Brookland there. Immediately on their entrance, he stepped forward and offered his arm to conduct Lucy to the dining-room.

"I hope we have not kept you waiting, papa," said Margaret; "I told Lucy confidentially what a tyrant you were."

"You might have let her find that out for herself; but your confidence does not seem to have alarmed her much—she does not seem in the least afraid."

"Afraid! oh, no," replied Lucy, laughing. "If you attempt to tyrannise over me, I shall be in a constant state of rebellion. I shall rather like that, as that kind of agitation suits my spirits."

"I should say you were inclined to be a rebel at heart, Miss Nutford," said Mr. Brookland, looking at her with kindly scrutiny.

"Well, perhaps I am," replied Lucy, "for sometimes I

feel as though I had got two selves, and one was always rebelling against the other."

"Oh! that is nothing," exclaimed Margaret. "Why I have fifty selves warring one with another. I think it is wonderful how I keep them all in order."

"There is no proof that you do," replied her father.

"Now I call that rank ingratitude, papa; do I not always present you with my best and most perfect self in the shape of an adoring obedient daughter?"

Mr. Brookland was beaten; he was obliged to retract and apologise, which he did with some cowardly equivocation and much laughter. Altogether the dinner passed off much more pleasantly than Lucy had expected, that being the first hour she had spent there, where everything was strange and new.

After all, in a large party as well as in a small one, a great deal depends upon the geniality of the host. He only can give tone to the conversation and flavour to the feast; and Mr. Brookland certainly did his best, in the most pleasant courtly fashion, to make his home agreeable to his daughter's friend. He succeeded so well that the smiles ran rippling over her face, pleasant words and quaint phrases tripped nimbly from her tongue, and her laughter came forth as fresh and free as it could have done if she had stood in her father's meadows in the heart of Cornwall.

Lucy was charmed with everything. Mr. Brookland was far less formidable, as he played the part of host in his own splendid home, than he had been to her when they had met abroad, or even for the last few days in Cornwall. There he always seemed formal, as though under some peculiar restraint; his efforts to be agreeable seemed forced, and were consequently feeble; but now all that had faded away, and he came out in his natural colours—a courtly gentleman, at ease himself, and resolved to set others at their ease also.

On the plea of being fatigued with their long journey, the two girls retired early to their rooms. Margaret dismissed her maid with all possible speed, and she and Lucy sat together, basking lazily before the fire, combing their long bright hair, and brushing out the short crisp curls, as they chatted away, in a gay girlish fashion, about those small nothings which were of so much more importance to them than

the graver subjects which older and wiser folks discuss. In one of their wordy wanderings the name of Paul Wynter was spoken.

"By-the-bye, Margaret," exclaimed Lucy, "I am surprised that you have never seen him since your return to England."

"Why should you be surprised? I never expected to see him. Besides, how could we see him unless he came to Brooklands, and why should he come here?"

Margaret was no hypocrite as a rule, but she was certainly playing the hypocrite now. In her secret heart she had wondered fifty times why he had not accepted her father's invitation, in deed as he had done in words, and paid them a visit before now. She had felt surprised, and not a little nettled, by his absence and his silence. After their brief but pleasant intimacy abroad, she thought it was unkind and discourteous of him to let it drop. Besides, she felt deeply indebted to him, and she would have liked to show him she was grateful, and had not forgotten him, though it seemed he had found it easier to forget them. She was nettled and hurt, but did not choose to expose that part of her inner self even to Lucy. Hence her answer was one of supreme indifference.

"Why?" repeated Lucy, "I think there are a great many reasons why he should come. Your father's friendship is not a thing to be despised, and I should think Mr. Wynter had some need of it; I am sure he is very poor."

"Perhaps that is the very reason why he would not seek it," said Margaret, brightening. "Men are so absurd."

"Did I never tell you we met him as we were coming over the Brunig pass?"

"No; did you?"

"Yes, and what do you think he was doing?"

"Something kind and generous, I am sure."

"You remember how deformed he is himself, and he cannot be very strong; but there he was, toiling along under a broiling sun, with a little crippled peasant child in his arms, while the poor mother, a miserable haggard-looking creature, crawled slowly behind. My father offered him a lift in our chaise, for he really looked as if he needed it; but he declined, he wouldn't "desert his party," he said, as he did not believe they could get on without him. My dear

old dad, I fancy, would have squeezed the whole party into the chaise, if it had not been for mother's awful glare of indignation."

They chatted on, perfectly oblivious of the flight of time. The bright fire crackled and spluttered till it wore itself out, dwindling away gradually to a few flickering embers. Then they began to feel chilly, and, with a shiver, acknowledged it was time to say good-night. It was past midnight, indeed verging on the small hours of the morning, when at last they parted. Lucy felt that restlessness which often accompanies a visit to a strange house. She was tired, and yet not inclined to go to bed. She sat a long time watching the embers die out, and thinking a thousand strange thoughts of what had been, what was, and what might be to come.

Her acquaintance with Margaret had already given a new colour to her life. She wondered what strange fate had guided her to Brooklands. For what purpose had she come?—Perhaps to sink for a few weeks in the lap of luxury and refinement, and then return home! To those who look at externals only, a return to such a pleasant rural home as Lucy's would be considered no sorrow—but rather a thing to be desired, to be looked forward to through months of expectation as a haven of rest and peace. And to the world-weary it would be so indeed; but Lucy was not world-weary—she wearied for the world, not of it. Her heart sickened at the quiet monotony of life at Rose Vale Farm, especially since her brother had departed from it. She had nothing but her father's love to cling to, and though she loved him with all her heart, yet there were many things that added bitterness even to that. She had had a hard task sometimes to keep her life in tune. It was like a wild garden full of sweet flowers, with thorns and briars growing up between; here and there were flowering shrubs of sentiment and romance, with good sound common-sense wandering among them, and to a certain extent keeping them all in order.

Lucy's spirit was busy with many rebellious thoughts and feelings on that her first night at Brooklands.



CHAPTER XII.

MRS. CREAMLY'S VISIT OF INSPECTION.

"I have no arms, no dusty monuments,
No broken images of ancestors,
Wanting an ear or nose ; no forged tables
Of long descents, to boast false honours from."

BEFORE twenty-four hours had passed, everybody in the village knew that a stranger had arrived at Brooklands. Her age, her appearance, and even her wardrobe, were freely canvassed over by the domestics. Who was she? and where did she come from? were questions ventilated in the servants' hall, to which no satisfactory answer could be given. The men who had waited at dinner were applied to for information, but though they had religiously fulfilled their functions, kept their eyes and ears open, and taken in as much of the table-talk as they could understand, and put their own construction upon a great deal that they could not, yet they could give no reliable information respecting Miss Nutford. One or two slight circumstances, however, were reported against her. In the first place, during dinner, she had declined wine and asked for beer. Then some complaint had been made by Mr. Brookland about the butter. She had looked at it with a business-like eye, pronounced the fault to be in the churning, and had even offered to go down into the dairy and set it right. She had seemed equally knowing on the subject of cheese. So much for the detective system employed during the dinner hour. The waiting-maid was indignant, because

her services had been declined, and her taste unconsciously impugned.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "it is hard, after being own maid to Miss Brookland all this time, to have my character taken away before my eyes!"

"Oh! never mind, Mrs. Reynolds," said the butler, who was considered rather a wit, and whose efforts that way, however feeble, generally created a laugh at somebody else's expense; "your character is not warranted to keep—I dare-say you'll have it back again."

"It's all very well for people to talk who have got no character, good, bad, or indifferent, that anybody would be inclined to take even on trial," replied Mrs. Reynolds. "Some people have got feeling, others have none, and I'd rather have my feelings wounded than my character blackened."

"Well, you know we are none of us the worse for a little polish," replied the butler, who exulted in keeping his own temper when other people lost theirs.

"I suppose you couldn't forget the pantry even for five minutes," replied Mrs. Reynolds, with a contemptuous toss of the head.

"If I did I should be afraid of forgetting myself," he answered.

"There are more ways than one of doing that," replied Mrs. Reynolds.

"Come, come, no jangling here!" exclaimed Mrs. Foster, who, now that Margaret no longer required a nurse, performed the duties of housekeeper; "and I like to hear my young lady's friends spoken of with respect. How has she been wounding your feelings, Reynolds?"

"How?—why, she's been finding fault with Miss Margaret's trimmings!—my last fanciful arrangement! I heard her with my own ears call it 'hideous!' 'shocking bad taste!' and when I went into the room, I found she had destroyed my idea, stript off the flowers and ribbons, and re-arranged them after her own taste. It's bad enough for a lady to find fault with one's taste, but when she sets up for taste of her own, it is simply disgusting."

This appropriate sentiment met with universal approval, and mental barricades were forthwith erected against Miss

Nutford in every breast. They came to a common understanding on the spot, deciding that she was quite welcome to stay at Brooklands as the friend of their young lady, so long as she behaved as such ; but the system of non-intervention was to be strictly carried out—any attempt on her part to infringe that, either by friendly suggestions or invidious remarks, or in any other manner offensive to their ideas of propriety, was to be resented in such a way as might thereafter be determined on. So decided the congress of the kitchen, and the unconscious Lucy was placed under the surveillance of Richards the butler, and Mrs. Reynolds the maid.

That favourite occupation of minding other people's business is extensively practised in all parts of the kingdom, and by all classes of persons—high and low, rich and poor ; it seems to flourish everywhere. It is somewhat remarkable that we rarely hear of a bankrupt newsmonger or an insolvent dealer in scandal and town-talk. They carry on a brisk trade, with little or no capital, for, when there is no real tangible fact to manipulate and trade upon, they create and circulate a lie. Brooklands was by no means behind the rest of the world in this respect. Every spark of news travelled with wonderful celerity, till it blazed from one end of the scattered village to another. So it happened that in a short space of time the fact of Lucy Nutford's arrival at Brooklands reached Mrs. Creamly's ears, and that energetic lady took an early opportunity of paying a visit to Margaret.

On arriving at Brooklands, she found the two girls singing duets together. Margaret received her cordially, and presented her in due form to Miss Nutford, to whom she bowed with the most bland and courteous grace, exclaiming,—

"I am afraid I am interrupting your charming performance. Really your voices blend so delightfully, you might have been practising with one another all your lives."

"I am glad you think they harmonise ; this is the first time we have tried them together," replied Lucy.

"Indeed ! then I congratulate you, Margaret dear, on having so charming an opportunity of developing your voice, which I always considered of the highest order."

"Oh ! no, Mrs. Creamly. My voice is thin and weak ; I can hardly sing at all."

"Now you are seeking for compliments," replied Mrs. Creamly. "What does Miss Nutford think about the matter?"

"I think Margaret will always sing well enough to please those who love her," replied Lucy, being thus appealed to.

"And I shall never care to please those who do not," replied Margaret; "and, by-the-bye, Lucy, what lovely voices some of the people in Cornwall have!"

"Oh, so you have been to Cornwall, my dear! Well, I called here about a week ago, and was astonished to find my bird had flown. Your departure was quite sudden, for, when I last saw you there was no talk of your leaving home."

"We started off with scarcely an hour's notice," replied Margaret.

"I hope it was nothing serious called you away?" said Mrs. Creamly.

"No, indeed; quite the reverse. I went solely on a pleasure trip, and I must say I found more pleasure than I expected. You see, I have been fortunate enough to persuade Miss Nutford to come back with me."

Mrs. Creamly smiled amiably at Lucy, saying she was sure she would be a great acquisition to Brooklands. Then, after a little skilful play, she cast the line to fish out Lucy's history.

"Knotford?" she said. "Umph! the name is very familiar to me; if it would not be an impertinent question, may I ask if you are related to the Knotfords of Knowlesy?"

"No," replied Lucy; "my name is spelt with an N—Nutford."

"Oh! yes, of course," said Mrs. Creamly, laying her head on one side like an inquisitive parrot; "I remember now, there is an old family of that name in Shropshire. They do boast of being the descendants of the great De Nutfords who came over with the Conqueror. Geoffrey de Nutford was created a peer in the reign of Edward IV.—you can read all about it in Sir Bernard Burke's 'Extinct Peerages.'"

"Pray do not give me credit for being anything half so grand as that," said Lucy laughingly. "Mine is a simple

Cornish family, and has not the slightest claim to distinction of any kind whatever ; and titled greatness is far beyond our ambition, either in the past, the present, or the future."

"You are none the worse for that, my dear," said Mrs. Creamly condescendingly. "A title does not always mean greatness ; very often it is like the tail of a paper kite, tacked on to a light body to keep it steady and give it weight and consideration in the world's eyes, or it might be floated away and lost in oblivion. What title could have added greatness to the noble character of Newton, or have raised the name of Shakespeare? No, my dear, do not apologise for want of worldly honours. Such things all pass away. Look at me ! Few people have greater claims to distinction than my family, yet see how we have decayed !"

"Yes, but decayed families have a sort of phosphorescent glow about them, like many other decayed things ; but, indeed, I had no intention to apologise, though I cannot lay claim even to the honours of decay," replied Lucy smiling.

Here Margaret struck in, and endeavoured to turn the conversation upon other subjects, and looked imploringly at Lucy to come forward and help her ; but Lucy only smiled back in answer. She seemed to be much amused by Mrs. Creamly's interest in genealogical matters, and resolved, so far as she herself was concerned, to let that lady lead the conversation in what direction she pleased. In vain Margaret threw out some few observations on matters which she knew were interesting to Mrs. Creamly. She seemed to see and avoid the bait, answering with as much brevity as politeness permitted—

"By-the-bye, Margaret, dear," she said, "will you ask your papa if he can see me for five minutes this morning? I wish particularly to speak to him."

As Margaret left the room upon this errand to her father, Mrs. Creamly returned to the attack.

"As I was saying, Miss Nutford, I am deeply interested in all subjects connected with genealogy. I think I am well up in the pedigrees of all the most distinguished families in England—it is my favourite study."

"Really !" replied Lucy—"what an extraordinary taste !

I should say that the study of other people's pedigrees was about the dullest and dreariest of all occupations."

"It may be to those who have no pedigree of their own," replied Mrs. Creamly, with a slight accent of reproach, "but to me it is the most delightful recreation. Some people only take pleasure in the history of the distinguished members of their own family. Now that is a species of selfish indulgence I never could encourage."

"Nor I," replied Lucy drily. "Unfortunately, my family has had no distinguished members to boast of."

"You are really too modest!" exclaimed Mrs. Creamly graciously, "though certainly the best and oldest Cornish families have a Tre, Pol, or Pen to their names; yet there are no doubt some very good families without it. *Yours*, I daresay, is one of these."

The inquisitorial tendency of Mrs. Creamly's discourse was so thinly disguised that it was perfectly apparent to Lucy, who determined not to satisfy her curiosity too soon. She was half amused and half angry at the persevering way in which that lady pushed her inquiries, though she would not let Margaret interfere to stop them.

"Well," she said, in reply to Mrs. Creamly's last suggestive observation, "your idea and mine of a good family may differ. You may call that only good which is simply old, and which after being filtered through generations of useless men and idle women, shows itself chiefly in a thin, watery, querulous kind of gentility, half weakness and half venom, when all the true spirit of nobility has evaporated and gone. Mine is not one of these."

"No, indeed, my dear," replied Mrs. Creamly, a little puzzled by Lucy's words and manner; "it would take a great deal of evaporation to exhaust your spirit—I am sure of that."

Lucy smiled, and played carelessly with her bracelet as she added—

"My ancestors had nothing noble about them; they all worked for their bread, tilled their own land—even handled their own plough. My father is a farmer—perhaps you will say a foolish one, when you see what he has made of me."

Mrs. Creamly flushed crimson when she heard this announcement. Certainly from Lucy's appearance, and the

fact of her being a visitor at Brooklands she had not expected anything so bad as that. A farmer's daughter!—and to make no attempt to disguise the fact! That, to Mrs. Creamly, was the strangest thing of all, and made her feel an odd sort of respect for the girl's courage in avowing it. She was so much taken aback, that for a second she did not know what to say in answer; and before she could recover herself, and make up her mind what was the best thing to say, Lucy added, with a charming smile—

“I am quite ready to give the history of my birth, parentage, and education, if it will be at all interesting to you. I do not generally satisfy inquisitive people, but you, I am sure, are not actuated by mere vulgar curiosity.”

“Curiosity!—no, indeed,” replied Mrs. Creamly; “there is nothing I despise so much as *motiveless* curiosity. And really, my dear, I admire your candour. It is not every young lady in your position that would acknowledge an obscure origin; and, after all, it's nothing to be ashamed of—we cannot choose our own parents.”

Mrs. Creamly's comforting condescension irritated Lucy more than her previous inquisitorial manner had done, but she would not give her irritation any outward expression.

“I agree with you,” she answered, with perfect coolness; “the child of an honest man has nothing to be ashamed of; and as for choosing one's parents, I would not change my father for any man in all the world.”

“A very proper and creditable feeling, and I am sure he must be a worthy and respectable man. Some of those who are in an humble sphere are really superior people—very well behaved and well-bred.”

“Exactly,” replied Lucy, “as those who walk in a higher sphere are sometimes both ill-mannered and ill-bred.”

Mrs. Creamly had a dim consciousness that she should get worsted in any wordy engagement with this spirited girl. Fortune, however, favoured her, and gave her a loop-hole whereby she might escape from any further discussion; for, as Lucy finished speaking, Margaret returned with a message from her father, saying he would be very glad to see Mrs. Creamly in his study.

She took leave of the two girls without delay. She had gathered as much information about Lucy from Lucy's self

as she thought she was likely to get from that quarter. She would now busy herself in gauging Mr. Brookland's feelings, and gleaning what stray facts and scraps she could from him.

As the door closed upon her, Lucy exclaimed,—

"My dear Margaret! what a detestable woman!"

"I saw she was showing you her cloven foot, Lucy," said Margaret smiling, "but I thought you were a match for her."

"Yes, and I caught fire at last. I hope you will not be vexed with me, Margaret dear; but I blazed up and gave her an illuminated history of my family—told her who, what I was, and where I came from. You should have seen her face! I am sure I fell fifty, oh! a hundred degrees in her esteem. I do not believe that all your efforts will ever pick me up, and set me right again. I gave checkmate to her curiosity, though. I do not think she will attack me again."

"I hope she was not rude to you," said Margaret, colouring with vexation, for she fancied that Lucy had been subjected to some unpleasantness, through Mrs. Creamly's ill-timed curiosity.

"Oh! dear no, not at all," replied Lucy; "on the contrary, she behaved with the most polite, well-bred impertinence possible. I have not had a great deal of experience in the great world, Margaret, but I should say that woman was a perfect specimen of the vulgar gentlewoman—I do not mean vulgarity of manner, in that she is refinement itself; but vulgarity of mind."

"It is a great pity she should be so full of foolish pride," observed Margaret, "her manner is sometimes offensive even to me. If she had only been born without a great-grandfather, and that dreadful estate in Oxfordshire, she would have been a very estimable woman. She is highly connected, and of a good old family; but very much reduced. I think poverty has soured her spirit."

"I see, it is a case of good wine turned to bad vinegar," returned Lucy; "but if you would not mind my being sceptical, Margaret dear, I should be inclined to doubt the fact of her being well born. Remember the saying, 'that the tree that is richly laden with fruit bends lowest to the ground, while that which is barren lifts its bare branches to the air.' That simile applies to families of men as well of trees. Those that are enriched with an ancient, honourable name and

worthy history are sweet-mannered, and bend beneath the weight of their own graciousness, like you and your dear father, Margaret ; but those of meaner or less degree ——”

“But I assure you, Lucy dear,” said Margaret, interrupting her, “Mrs. Creamly really belongs to one of the best and oldest families in all Oxfordshire.”

“Well, then,” said Lucy, “I suppose there must be fag-ends and remnants of old families as well as of other old things, and she must be one of these ; for I am sure her nature is full of ragged, jagged edges, and all the bright colours are faded and worn out.”

“Oh ! Lucy,” exclaimed Margaret, “papa says I am hard on Mrs. Creamly, I do not know what he would say if he heard you. Of course, I see her foolish follies in the same light as you do, but I think if she was better off she would be altogether different. You know, dear, poverty, like some medicines, acts differently on different constitutions.”

“It has acted with very disagreeable effects on her !” exclaimed Lucy.

“But she is very good to the poor—indeed, she is indefatigable in her labours among them, both in sickness and in health.”

“Because she likes interfering in other people’s business.”

“Never mind the cause,” said Margaret, rather gravely, “if the effect is good.”

“She would have a very bad effect on me. I can’t fancy her impertinent, prying, patronising ways. I should pity any poor wretch who is beholden to Mrs. Creamly. There are some people in the world to whom I would not be under any obligation—I would rather die first ! I hope you do not mind my speaking out what I think of her, Margaret dear, but she aggravated me so !”

“Not at all—she aggravates me too sometimes,” replied Margaret. “I daresay her manners were offensive to you ; but for my sake, Lucy, you must not take too strong a prejudice against her. She is very often at Brooklands, and papa has a strong regard for her. I do not really expect you to like her, but I do not want you to come to open warfare.”

“Oh ! there is no fear of that,” replied Lucy. “I daresay we shall have a little light skirmishing now and then ; but there will be little damage done on either side.”

A shade of anxiety crossed Margaret's face—she was sorry her two friends had come into collision on their first meeting. She had intended to propitiate Lucy, and bespeak her tolerance of Mrs. Creamly's peculiarities, which were certainly calculated to irritate and chafe the sensitive spirit of a girl in Lucy's peculiar position; but Mrs. Creamly had paid them such an early and unexpected visit, that there had been no time for preparation. Still, Margaret hoped she might keep matters straight between them by skilful management. At any rate, she resolved that they should not meet oftener than she could help it. Lucy's quick eye noticed the shadow on Margaret's face, and with an instinctive knowledge of what was passing in her mind, threw her arms round her neck, saying,—

“Do not be afraid, Margaret dear, I will never say a word that can vex you—I would rather let her play upon my naked nerves, or throw my heart beneath her feet, and let her tread upon it.”

Without another word the girls understood one another perfectly. It was tacitly agreed, as plainly as though they had made an agreement in spoken words, that Mrs. Creamly was a person to be conciliated, certainly not openly offended. Whatever antipathy, or antagonistical feeling, might awake in Lucy's breast, it was not to be uttered aloud. She must curb her thoughts, rein in her high spirits, and make them canter within the strict bounds of courtesy.





CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE.

"It gives me wonder, great as my content,
To see you here before me."



LIFE at Brooklands wore a sweet and pleasant aspect to Lucy Nutford. Her whole nature seemed to expand and sink into the luxurious refinements that surrounded her. She seemed to breathe fresh air, fresh life in the pleasant atmosphere of Margaret's stately home. Some invisible influence seemed to administer to her spiritual need, and give her a taste of that rich fruited wine of life for which she had been so long athirst. In no one thing especially lay the charm of this new existence—it lingered round everything, material and immaterial. The hours flew with that sweet serenity which hitherto she had not known.

She was never chafed by those small irritating matters that used to vex her at home at Rose Vale, in which matters, it must be owned, her step-mother played a conspicuous part. Her distorted views of religion, as well as of other subjects, were so constantly forced on Lucy's sight as to irritate and sometimes confuse her senses. She could not bear Mrs. Nutford's perpetual assaults on her with Scriptural texts and phrases—they seemed to jar upon her spirit of reverence, and indeed had a very opposite effect from the one intended.

Of her father she often thought, and always with a long-

ing, loving spirit. Had she been selfish to leave him? She knew he would miss her—miss her sadly, and be very lonely without her. She fancied she could see the old man taking his solitary saunter in the garden, when the labourers were all gone and the day's work done; she knew he would miss her then.

"Dear old father!" she would murmur, half aloud, "if he could only see me here, how proud and happy he would be!" The old man's rough speech never wounded her, for she knew and valued the grand simplicity of his nature. She looked upon her father as a rough diamond, full of imprisoned light; if he had been cut and polished in the social and intellectual world, she believed he would have turned out a brilliant of the first water, with a hundred glittering faces that would astonish and dazzle mankind. So their two natures, though differing in almost every degree, in spite of opposite tastes and dissimilar occupations, clung together, as we have seen the delicate and graceful honeysuckle twine round the untrained rugged brier, with never a tendril wounded. The presence of that dear father would have filled her cup of happiness to overflowing. Mrs. Creamly's smiling face and honeyed tongue formed the only dark speck upon the horizon of her present existence. She found great pleasure in the scholarly conversation and courteous geniality of Mr. Brookland, and her affection for Margaret deepened every hour. Lucy fancied that in her she had found the congenial spirit-mate for which she had been unconsciously seeking all her past days. Sometimes they would sit for an hour together talking over their strange meeting and the mutual affection that seemed to awaken at the same moment in them both; and they would discuss the matter in a most orthodox way, propounding a belief that they had lived before, and that their two natures had blended together in some sweet intimacy during a former existence.

They had occasional visitors at Brooklands, but not many, for Mr. Brookland did not like indiscriminate visiting, and the friends (with the exception of Mrs. Creamly) with whom they were inclined to be intimate, lived too far away for any brisk visiting to be kept up between them. Time passed pleasantly enough, indeed it often seemed to

fly too fast. They spent the hours lounging in the sunshine, or rowing on the bosom of the placid lake, idling away the time in a pleasant dreamy fashion, indulging in the real *dolce far niente*, so enjoyable in the rich summer season of the year, as in the summer of our lives. Lucy had been three entire days at Brooklands, when she began to reproach herself for having written but one short note to her father, and that merely to tell him of her safe arrival at her destination.

"Really, Margaret," she exclaimed, as she recalled that fact, "I feel quite ashamed of myself; I will sit down this very day, and do penance—a pleasant penance, too. I will write a dozen pages to my dear old father, and give him such a description of this beautiful place, that he will quite long to see it."

"Well," replied Margaret, "if you are going to be busy writing home, I think I shall leave you to yourself and go for a long walk with papa. He proposed a ramble, and I was going to ask you to accompany us; but of course you will be better engaged, and I shall have no compunction in leaving you."

"You need never have that," replied Lucy, "I am so used to be alone; I like it. Besides, I mean to be especially busy to-day, to make up for lost time; and if I can I shall write a line to Claude—dear old Claude! He is such a genius!"

"I should like to see him," said Margaret.

"And I should like him to see you; and I daresay he will one day," replied Lucy.

"I do not suppose we shall be home before it is time to dress for dinner," said Margaret, as she rose languidly to leave the room; "when papa gets a rambling fit in his head, it is difficult to get him home again. If you should want anything, Lucy dear, apply to Mrs. Foster; I have given her orders to attend to you."

For some few minutes after Margaret's departure, Lucy sauntered about the room. She could not settle down to write all at once. She paced up and down that gorgeous apartment, feeling strangely alone. She fancied herself, for the time being, mistress of all she surveyed, and fluttered about from one place to another, looking at the quaint old

china, inspecting the works of art, and casting many a glance at her own beautifully-moulded form, as it was reflected in the many mirrors that were placed in different parts of the room. She smiled as she thought how much better she looked, and of how much more importance, in that grand stately room than in the small low-roofed chambers of Rose Vale Farm. She next sauntered to the window, and looked out upon the extensive prospect; the magnificent park, with its velvet turf and undulating ground; groups of grand old trees, with the graceful deer herding beneath their umbrageous branches. For awhile she stood there, looking dreamily out. A strange far-away look came into her eyes, as though her thoughts had travelled to other scenes and things less fair and bright than those that now surrounded her. She turned away; a long breath, half a sigh, escaped her; then she went quickly towards the writing-table, sat down, drew the blotting case towards her, and commenced her letters. Her pen ran as rapidly as her thoughts; there was no stopping to frame phrases, round sentences, or polish similes; she wrote as though she was speaking to her father, face to face, letting the words fall upon the paper as they would have fallen upon his ear, if they had been walking under the apple trees at Rose Vale. She finished her letter, and then looked at her watch. It was just four o'clock; she would have ample time, she thought, to write a long letter to Claude. She would seal her letter first, though, lest she should forget it, for her father had an old-fashioned prejudice against adhesive envelopes. The size of the seal, and the impression of the wax, seemed to give the letter a decided importance in his eyes. As she lighted the taper, she heard the sound of wheels rattling over the drawbridge.

"Visitors!" she said half aloud. "Well, that does not signify, they will not interfere with me;" and she proceeded leisurely to seal her letter. She heard the carriage roll away, as she resumed her seat at the writing-table. Her pen flew over the pages, and, as she wrote on, she laughed, a low soft musical laugh, to herself. Possibly some light humorous satire was dropping from her pen. Then her face softened with sentiment as she gave a vivid word-painted picture of the beauties of Brooklands—the pictur-

esque old house, with its fine park and herds of graceful deer. And "such sunlight, Claude!" she added: "everything here is so bright and pleasant, all that is gloomy and dark lies far off; it seems impossible that a cloud can ever rest upon such a place as this."

As she hastened to conclude her letter, the door opened and shut quickly. She did not even glance up from her paper, supposing it was one of the domestics who had looked in upon some household matters. But soon a feeling came over her that she was not alone. She heard no footfall—the velvet-piled carpet would have smothered that—not a breath, nor the movement of a limb; yet she knew she was not alone. She might have looked round and discovered at once who was the intruder, but she did not. She gathered her writing materials leisurely together. She was seated in the library, a large low-pitched room, full of quaint nooks and corners, in one of which stood the writing-table, and above it was an old-fashioned mirror. As she lifted her eyes, they fell upon its shining surface. A crimson flush suffused her cheeks, then faded, and left her white and pale even to her lips. She did not speak—she scarcely seemed to breathe; but she kept her eyes fixed, and wide open, as though they would never close again, upon the face of a man reflected in the mirror. It seemed impossible that the living man should be standing there in the library at Brooklands! She fancied it could not be flesh and blood she saw, for he was stiff and motionless as herself, looking thoughtfully (not at her) but at a mass of books, letters, and MSS. that were scattered upon the library table. Suddenly he moved, stretched out his hand, and she knew it was his living self she saw. She rose from her seat. A look of life and love, surprise and joy, came over her face. She called him by his name "Joel" and went forward with outstretched hands to meet him.

"Lucy!" he exclaimed, and a look of amazement, almost dismay, crossed his face.



CHAPTER XIV

DECEPTION.

“Love on his lips and hatred in his heart,
His motto—Constancy ; his creed, to part.”



AFTER the first exclamation of surprise and pleasure at their unexpected meeting had been uttered, each began to inquire of the other, and to wonder what strange circumstance had brought them both to Brooklands, the most unlikely place in all the world where they could ever have hoped or expected to meet. Lucy's bright inquiring eyes were fixed with an eager questioning look on the face of Joel Craig, who did not—indeed, with all his self-command, he could not—return her gaze with an equally honest eye. In fact, it may as well be candidly confessed that Lucy's presence there had sent a chill to his very heart. They had parted six months ago at her quiet home in Cornwall, when circumstances (to be more fully dealt with presently) had occurred which compelled him to quit that part of the country ; and Mr. Nutford had desired that no communication should be kept up between his daughter and Mr. Joel Craig ; which desire had been scrupulously obeyed by both parties.

Up to the time of their parting, Mr. Joel Craig had greatly admired Lucy, and had made no secret of his admiration. Indeed, so far from wishing to conceal it, he

took every opportunity of avowing openly that he had advanced her to the highest possible place in his affection. He talked of the present and the future, in both of which she bore a prominent part. His visits to the farm became more and more frequent, for the old man had been caught by his brilliant dashing manners, and the amusing anecdotes and quaint stories with which he enlivened the monotonous hours when they were gathered round the fireside at Rose Vale Farm. But there came a time when the warm greeting he had been in the habit of receiving changed to cool courtesy ; and one evening, when Mr. Joel Craig made his appearance at the usual hour, Mr. Nutford met him at the gate, and plainly told him his visits were no longer welcome.

"In plain words," said Mr. Joel Craig angrily, "you forbid me your house !"

"Well, I suppose that is just about what it comes to," replied Mr. Nutford, in his slow measured tone.

"But what have I done to deserve such strange treatment? Surely I have a right to demand the reason of it?"

"Of course you have ; but I ain't obliged to give any reason in particular, though I don't mind saying, in a general way, that I do not care to keep company with a man who will turn like a viper and sting his best friend, and in my opinion that is what you have done. When I see you stand up in the witness-box, and put your mouth against the old man who had befriended you all your life—I—well, I would rather have been him than you. Ingratitude is a wicked sin, Mr. Craig ; like Aaron's rod, it swallows up a good many little uns."

"This is really too absurd," replied Mr. Craig, with superlative contempt. "What would you have had me do? I was compelled to appear, and spoke but the truth."

"I would have strangled the truth, and let it lie dead in the bottom of my heart ; it should never have leapt out and fastened on the life and honour of my best friend. I see old Mr. Treherne's face when you stood up in the witness-box, and the Lord forbid I should ever see such a sight again !"

"So it seems that I am to undergo a private persecution because I have performed a public duty! Really, Mr. Nutford, your conduct almost amounts to an offence in law. Take care how you influence other people against me, or you may chance to be indicted for conspiracy."

"I don't know much about law or conspiracies either, but I am quite wise enough to know that this is a free country; every man may choose his own company, and I don't choose your'n."

On one or two similar occasions, Mr. Joel Craig found himself in an equally awkward position. He could not persuade his friends that his conduct had been strictly marked by probity and honour. In fact, it was generally believed that he had deviated far from them. People began to look on him with suspicion. He was a marked man, there was no denying it. Some avoided him altogether, and those who did not were uneasy in his company. No one spoke openly to his injury, but it was evident that in silent secrecy the tide of public opinion set dead against him. He left Cornwall about a month before Mr. Nutford's family started on their Continental tour, where they had met Mr. and Miss Brookland at the Splügen Hôtel.

Lucy Nutford's surprise at meeting Mr. Craig at Brooklands was only equalled by his confusion at finding her so comfortably installed and so perfectly at home. Their mutual explanation was simple enough, and made in a very few words.

"Ah! I understand!" exclaimed Lucy, as Mr. Craig explained to her how matters stood between him and Mr. Brookland. "So *you* are the very agreeable gentleman to whom Margaret has promised me an introduction. Ah! Joel, she little thinks how long and how well we have known each other. How surprised she will be when she finds we are already such good friends!"

"But, my dear Lucy," he answered, "that is an interesting fact which for the present I really would rather she should remain in ignorance of. I do not wish you to claim me as an old acquaintance just now."

"Certainly, if you desire it, I will not claim your acquaintance at all," replied Lucy, with heightened colour; "if you please we will be strangers now and always."

"That would not please me at all," he answered; "one day I shall be only too proud to claim my darling's love; only for the present, for a little while at least, I think it will be quite as well for us to keep our own secret."

"I have no secret," said Lucy; "and yet," she added, reflectively, "perhaps I can hardly say that now—I do not know what I shall do, what I ought to do, for if my father knew you were here, he would fetch me home, and—and perhaps say something that might injure you in Mr. Brookland's estimation."

"That is exactly what I foresee," he answered eagerly; "your father is so full of pig-headed prejudices, he regards all things from one narrow point of view ——"

"You mean to say," said Lucy, interrupting him, "that he is so straightforward, he shrinks from anything that is contrary to his notion of right."

"Taking it for granted that his notion must necessarily be the correct one, therefore other men must rule their conduct according to his notion of right and wrong, not according to their own. I do not wish to say anything disrespectful of your father ——"

"Not to me, of course," she said shortly.

"Nor to anyone else; but, my dear Lucy, you must acknowledge that he has not enjoyed an extensive worldly experience, and his views of men and things are not of the most liberal description." He smiled a light pleasant smile as he added, "You remember how angry he was when they first built an organ for the little church at Buse; he never entered it for months, and used to walk a mile round for fear he should hear the sound of it."

Lucy smiled too, as though his words called forth some sunny memory.

"Dear old father!" she said, in a caressing tone; "I love him all the better for his amusing little prejudices. You know they are all on the generous side."

"As witness his great sympathy with Mr. Treherne's crime," replied Mr. Joel Craig, satirically.

"Say misfortune!" exclaimed Lucy; "he never sympathised with his crime."

"The one rose out of the other; but as I was going to say, his sympathy with Mr. Treherne made him ungenerous

to me. I could not have acted otherwise than I did in that unfortunate affair, Lucy. *You* at least believe me."

"Yes ; it would grieve me too much to think otherwise."

"I would have done anything to keep clear of the matter ; but I was dragged into it. I passed through a most anxious and painful ordeal. However, it is all past now, and I never wish to recur to it again. Our meeting here at Brooklands, however delightful it may be in one way, is decidedly awkward in another. You will see at once my reasons for wishing our—our engagement to be kept secret. I do not wish to reproach you, Lucy ; though, if I were inclined to be ungenerous, I might do so with some show of justice."

"What have I done ?"

"For six months you have been content that we should be strangers, at your father's desire ; you have let our engagement lie between us like a thing forgotten ; now you seem angry and hurt, because I ask you, for my sake, to let it lie for a while unnoticed."

"There is a great difference between my father's wish and yours. Men understand very little of women, and you do not understand me at all. I own I was hurt that you should propose, so suddenly and so coolly, that we should seem not to know each other. *You* can either conceal or cancel our engagement, whichever you please—I shall never take the trouble to proclaim it."

"My dear Lucy, you are ridiculously indignant at my simple words—you are too warm ——"

"And you are too cool. You wish me to play a false and unworthy part—to undergo the ordeal of a polite introduction to you—to smile and bow as though we met here for the first time, and were perfect strangers. Am I not right ?"

"So far as you have gone, yes," he answered.

"I could not do it. I have been received here with every kindness and hospitality. Miss Brookland and I are great friends, as intimate—more so, perhaps, than many sisters are—and you wish me to return the affectionate regard and confidence I receive with a species of treachery against which my heart rebels."

"What a capital actress you would have made, Lucy !"

exclaimed Mr. Joel Craig, admiringly. "You gave that last 'against which my heart rebels' with wonderful dramatic power. But you are wrong—altogether wrong. Treachery is a remarkably strong and unpleasant word; there is no need for it, or anything like it—I only ask you to keep silence."

"Treachery may be effectively acted, though not a word is spoken," said Lucy.

"The Brooklands are new acquaintances of yours as well as of mine," he resumed, "and I do not see that they have any right to complain because they are not taken into our entire confidence. The simple fact of your being here on a visit to Brooklands, by no means renders it necessary for you to enlighten them on your domestic affairs, nor on mine."

"No, certainly not," she answered, hesitating slightly. "I do not suppose I should ever have mentioned your name to Miss Brookland, except for your being here now."

"Why should that make any difference? I am not here by any contrivance of yours; I come as Mr. Brookland's friend, and by his express invitation, quite irrespective of you. Except at breakfast and dinner, I do not suppose we shall often meet—certainly never alone. If I were proposing anything clandestine or underhand, I could understand your hesitation. As for your father, surely you are not expected to give him a chronicle of the arrival and departure of Mr. Brookland's guests? Let my name be a dead letter between you; it has been so a long time at his pleasure—let it be so now at mine."

"There is some truth in what you say," returned Lucy; "but still ——"

Joel Craig knew, by the irresolution that crept over her face, that his point was almost gained—a bold stroke, and he would win the day.

"Well, my dearest Lucy," he said, and as he spoke he took both her hands in his, and looked at her with all the tenderness of love gathered in his eyes, "if you have any serious scruples, I say no more. I love you too well to cause you a moment's pain. Of course Mr. Brookland must know that I have been here, but I will hurry back to town and write my excuses, telling him that I came down to make

them in person, but was unable to await his return. When your visit is over, and you have gone back to Cornwall, I will return and transact my business. I do not suppose he will be much inconvenienced. I shall be the only sufferer, but that does not matter. And now let me see you look a little more like yourself. I must have a glimpse of the old Lucy before I go, since go I must."

"No, stay!" she answered, slowly withdrawing her hands from his. "I have no right—no wish to interfere with any of your arrangements." She smiled slightly—not the bright, genial smile that sprung to her lips when she first saw his face; there was something of pain, pride, and sorrow in it as she added—"But the old Lucy has gone away, and I do not think she will ever come back."

He took no notice of her last words, but resumed, as though in answer to her first remark,—

"Certainly any signs of recognition between us would interfere with me very much. You tell me the Brooklands have been down to your father's farm. I have no doubt the Treherne troubles formed the staple of his conversation. I wonder how it was my name did not crop up."

"My father would not willingly do an injustice to any man; and he took special care, when speaking of those unfortunate circumstances, never to mention your name."

"I am much obliged to him for his consideration; but you must see, Lucy, how very unpleasant it would be for the affair to be revived here, which would certainly be the case if we acknowledged ourselves to be old acquaintances. One word brings up another; there is no knowing where it would lead, or how it would end. It is much easier to cloud a man's reputation than to clear it. If I were accused of anything real or tangible, I could grapple with it, and have it proved or disproved; but no man dares to accuse me—they have only succeeded in raising a hazy sort of suspicion against me. It is impossible to fight with a shadow, and I have neither the courage nor the patience to try to live it down—so I left it behind. If my name were to be connected in Mr. Brookland's mind with those unfortunate affairs, it would have a most injurious effect upon my prospects; and—and I am glad you agree to my proposal, like the sweet unselfish girl I always thought you."

Again he took her hand ; it lay cold and listless in his. There was no response in answer to his soft pressure ; hers might have been a dead hand for any signs of life it gave to him. She had turned her head away, and was gazing out over Brooklands, with a far-away look in her eyes. She made no answer to his last words—she did not even seem to hear them.

He misread her silence utterly. He fancied she was angry and hurt at his allowing her to assume the position of a stranger, without some expressions of regret or protestations warmer still. He hastened to recover his lost ground, and lamented bitterly that this, their first meeting, after so long a separation, should be clouded by any untoward circumstances.

“But it is no fault of mine,” he added ; “necessity often compels us to do things that both our conscience and inclination condemn. It will be a great trial to me to look upon you with the eyes of a seeming stranger, and it will be even worse to receive from you the cool courtesy or polite indifference of a mere passing acquaintance. It is hard on us both, but we must submit. I shall watch my opportunity, and try sometimes to see you alone. For an hour, at least, we will try to think the old days have come back.”

Lucy turned from the window, and looked full in his face as she answered,—

“Pray do not put yourself to any inconvenience on my account. I do not wish the old days to be revived ; we might as well try to resuscitate the dead. I feel that what has been never can be again. Perhaps, after all, our unexpected meeting here has been for the good of us both. You may rest easy, for I promise that I will not claim your acquaintance, either now or ever again. It will be best and wisest to carry out my father’s wish, according to the spirit as well as the letter ; so that we will not only seem, but be strangers.”

“Only for a time, I trust—but for a time,” he said, eagerly. “I see you misunderstand my wish, and misinterpret my words. But I am hardly surprised at that. I have had a disagreeable task to perform, and I am afraid I have done it awkwardly.”

“Not at all ; you have done it most effectually. If you

had gone through the whole dictionary, you could not have chosen more appropriate words to cover your design. I can understand now the expression of your face when you first saw mine."

"I own I was surprised ——" he began.

"You were something more—you were dismayed."

"And naturally so. The sight of you brought to my mind many unpleasant matters I wished to forget. I own that the pleasure of our meeting was dashed by the circumstances of it. My feeling for you is the same as it was."

"Only you have found a different way of expressing it," interrupted Lucy, with a slight curl of her upper lip.

"I have not changed in the least, whatever you may think to the contrary. In speaking to you as I have done, I have only obeyed the dictates of common prudence; to have acted otherwise would have been risking a great deal. As you well know, I am not at all romantically inclined. I could not carry out the comedy of 'All for love, or the world well lost.' You profess to like frankness, and I am speaking frankly now."

"Thank you. Your frankness is amusing, and dramatically illustrated. And now I do not think we have any more to say to each other; and ——" she looked at her watch with perfect *sang froid*—"it is almost time for me to dress for dinner."

"Well, let things be as you wish," he said; "but at least you will shake hands. It is impossible that we two could ever be enemies."

"No, not enemies, certainly," she answered; "but I do not see how we could be *friends*; for friends respect and trust one another. We cannot do that, so we had better be nothing; or, if anything, mere acquaintances, and no more."

They shook hands, and so parted. Mr. Joel Craig walked to the window, whistling a low soft tune, as he always did when he was perplexed or thoughtful. He felt that the *contretemps* had passed more pleasantly than he had at first expected. Casting his eyes across the park, he saw Mr. Brookland's carriage winding along in the distance. He seized his hat and went out to meet it. Meanwhile Lucy went up to her room with a dazed, stupid feeling in her

head, and an aching pain in her heart. She sat down, gazing vacantly out of the window, thinking, or rather trying to arrange her thoughts in thinking order. The last hour seemed more like a dream than an awakening. For the last six months one of the brightest features in her life had been the expectation of meeting Mr. Joel Craig again. She had painted it in all the glowing colours of imagination, had seen him with her mind's eye, spoken to him, listened to him, while all the thoughts, hopes, and longings that had gathered in their hearts during their enforced estrangement, bubbled up and overflowed their lips. All was made right at home, and the old days were renewed with double sweetness. This was the fancy sketch—what a fearful daub reality had made of it! It seemed impossible that they had just stood face to face, looked such looks, spoken such words, and parted.

She gave a retrospective glance, and went over their interview word by word, glance by glance. She recalled the expression of his face when their eyes first met. She could not understand it then, she could not quite comprehend it now, but she knew enough—too much. There had not been a shadow, not a semblance of love in it—he had been grieved to meet, glad to part. She knew that now, though she had been blinded then. She was wholly humbled. Her cheeks tingled with shame, for she knew her whole soul had sprung to her eyes and lips, quickening every pulse, thrilling every nerve, in the first joy of their meeting. She hoped and prayed he had not seen it. She was better satisfied with her conduct afterwards. Whatever she felt, she believed that she had not shown him how wretched his lost love had made her. Had she lost it, or had she never possessed it? Perhaps he had never really cared for her at all, but had merely amused himself, indulging in a mere freak of fancy, and nothing more—at least, nothing more to him, but how much to her! She did not know till then how entirely her thoughts had loosened themselves from all other things, and turned to him, twining round him with close, clinging tenderness, leading her to look forward to a life where he was the grand centre figure, the one bright reality, when everything else was indistinct and shadowy.

Was it really true that they had parted, and were to be as

strangers always? Yes, she herself had said it; but why? Then, with strange, contradictory feeling, she tried to think she had been impatient, unjust, and cold to him. After all, what was it he had asked of her? Merely that she would not claim his acquaintance—no more than that. Perhaps he might have had some reason for his desire. She had given him no time to explain himself; her proud spirit had caught fire and blazed up too soon, and burnt all the bright colour out of her life. She tried to reason against reason, to hope against hope. One moment she blamed herself, the next she was in arms against him. She remembered his words, tones, looks, even the touch of his hand; and her heart told her the truth, dispelling the glamour she was trying to cast over her senses. She rose from her chair, murmuring with white, trembling lips, "He does not care for me!—he never loved me; and I—well, I shall hate him soon!" She heard the carriage drive over the drawbridge, and in another moment she heard Margaret's sweet bird-like voice mingling with another, manly and strong, but as free and joyous as her own. Lucy walked to her glass, and looked at herself.

"What a wretched, woe-begone creature I am!" she said, gazing angrily upon the reflection it gave her back. It was woe-begone indeed!—a white face with compressed lips. There was no dimple in the cheeks, no soft mobility about the mouth now. The lines of the face seemed rigid, and the eyes, the proud, passionate eyes, had a settled look of defiant misery which was pitiable to behold. There were no tears, no hysterical emotions; she crushed down the feelings of sorrow, wounded pride, anger, and hurt affections, and sent back the hot tears from her eyes, till they seemed to lie heavy and frozen on her heart. "He, at least, shall never know how much I feel," she said, unconsciously speaking aloud; "it was the suddenness of the blow—I shall be all right to-morrow."

She bathed her face and eyes, which were so painfully hot and feverish. She next proceeded to arrange her hair, and select her dress and ribbons with special care. Perhaps she had seldom paid so much attention to her toilette, or found herself so difficult to please. Presently she heard the rustling of Margaret's dress as she came along the corridor,

entered her dressing-room, and with a light, quick step, crossed to the door that communicated with Lucy's room.

"Anybody at home?" she asked, with a gentle tap at the panel.

"Come in," answered Lucy, in her usual tone; and as Margaret entered the room, she turned to receive her with a smile upon her lips. "You have had a long drive, and I hope you have enjoyed it; but I need hardly ask ——"

"Oh! it has been delightful!" exclaimed Margaret. "We went as far as Yewbury—quite to the top of the hill. We got out and walked up. There was all the promise of a glorious sunset, but, of course, we could not stay to see it; and we are rather late home as it is. Ah! there is the dressing-bell; but you are dressed already, and," she looked at her attentively, adding, "how charming you look! A trifle pale, perhaps; but these blue ribbons become you admirably. I wanted you to look particularly well to-night, Lucy, for there is a new arrival below, a friend of papa's, Mr. Joel Craig; but you must take care and not fall in love with him." She laughed as she held up her finger warningly.

"Is he so very dangerous?" asked Lucy, in the same tone.

"See him and judge for yourself," answered Margaret. "I will not trust myself to describe him. You might expect too much, or too little, you know."

"But you like him?"

"Like him," repeated Margaret—"in some ways, yes; but ——"

"Not in all ways?" inquired Lucy, with more earnestness, perhaps, than so slight an occasion demanded.

"Oh! you are far too curious, Lucy," laughed Margaret. "In all ways' comprehends a great deal; but this much I will tell you, I think he is handsome, clever, agreeable, witty, and ——"

"Oh! pray spare me!" exclaimed Lucy, with a sudden irritation in her manner, which, however, passed unnoticed by Margaret. "Such a catalogue of perfections is overwhelming. I wonder you have not fallen a victim to them."

"And how do you know I have not?" replied Margaret,

merrily ; and before Lucy had time to make either rejoinder or remark, Mrs. Foster, the most privileged person in the house, put her head in at the door, saying,—

“The bell's just rung, Miss Margaret, and if you don't dress directly, you'll be late for dinner.”

“So I shall, nurse ; thank you for reminding me. I will not be long, Lucy.” She nodded and returned to her own room, and the simple mysteries of her toilette commenced. For the first time since she had been at Brooklands, Lucy was glad when Margaret left her. It was a relief to be alone. The smile faded from her lips ; her thoughts took a different turn, away from the grief she was suffering to the wrong she was committing. Was it possible she had played the hypocrite so well?—had received Margaret's ingenuous communication, exchanged common-place remarks, and half-playful bantering words ; had heard his name, his appearance, his attractions catalogued, and made no sign ? Her cheeks glowed hot with shame, and her heart smote her painfully. What should she do?—what could she do ? She was still wondering and thinking in great perplexity, when Margaret entered, that they might go down to the drawing-room together. Lucy hid her secret away out of sight, and the two girls descended side by side, to all outward appearances linked together in perfect harmony and confidence. Their outer lives were flowing on pleasantly and calmly enough, but in what different directions they were flowing beneath the surface ! The one was bright and sparkling, full of sweet secret hopes and silent longing ; the other was dark and troubled with thick coming heavy thoughts. Her feet had entered a new unknown path ; through what strange crooked ways it might lead her God alone could tell. She could see nothing—everything before and around her seemed dark and threatening. She felt she was doing wrong, passively, if not actively, committing a great social fault, in not openly acknowledging that she and Mr. Joel Craig were, or at least had been, great friends. A few hours ago how proudly, how joyfully she would have claimed him ; but he had forbidden it, and why ? She could not comprehend his reasons, or how he could be injured by inquiry or remark, as he had said he should. She only knew he had repudiated and thrown off her affection, as plainly as a man could do

without absolutely rejecting it in spoken words. She had not had time yet to think or reason correctly; she was suffering from outraged pride and love, or she might have acted differently.

Mr. and Mrs. Creamly, Dr. Reeves, and one or two others were in the drawing-room when they entered. Lucy knew them all very well, and they mutually exchanged the usual common-place greetings; but there was one among them whose presence she felt rather than recognised with her eyes; he was the only supposed stranger, and she hoped to escape an introduction to him. Mr. Brookland and Mr. Joel Craig were conversing together when the girls entered the room; presently they crossed over to where Lucy stood exchanging some small courtesies with Mr. Creamly. Mr. Brookland, addressing her, said kindly,—

“My dear, we have a pleasant addition to our quiet domestic circle, that will, I am sure, be welcome to you as to the rest of us. Let me introduce you to Mr. Joel Craig—Miss Nutford.”

The dinner-bell rang—she heard his familiar voice speaking to her with the courteous politeness of a new acquaintance.

“May I have the pleasure?” He offered his arm, and she knew she was allotted to him for his companion during the dinner hour. Her step was firm, her face serene and calm, though she seemed to be walking in a mist, with her hand laid lightly on his arm. After the usual little stir and pleasant bustle, the guests fell into their proper places, and she found herself seated by his side at the dinner-table, to be the recipient of his attention for the next two hours.





CHAPTER XV.

A DINNER PARTY.

“Conscience, what art thou? thou tremendous power!
Who dost inhabit us without our leave,
And art within ourselves another self—
A master self, that loves to domineer,
And treat the monarch frankly as the slave.”

NEVER did Lucy quite understand how she managed to get through the ordeal of that terrible dinner at Brooklands. At the time she felt as though some numbing influence lay upon her senses, deadening the power of feeling. The whole machinery of her brain seemed to be working in a slow sluggish way, its course of action being impeded, though not entirely set wrong. The bright wax lights, in multiplied numbers, seemed to dance before her eyes; and the perfume of the gay flowers, stealing subtly over her senses, made her faint from their very sweetness. She went through the usual formalities of dinner mechanically, scarcely knowing what she was doing—she was only conscious of an aching heaviness on her brow, and a dull pain at her heart; but no one would have observed that she was in any way different from her usual self. She refused one dish, accepted another, spoke when there was occasion for speaking, and talked the usual amount of small talk common on those occasions of dull sociability; but she hardly recognised the sound of her own voice, it sounded so strange to her ears—indeed, it

seemed to her that some other person was speaking, using her merely as a machine, laying the words upon her lips which she let fall.

She caught occasional scraps of the conversation that was passing around her, and in which she was supposed to be deeply interested. The lights and shadows that swept over her face passed current for the expression of assent or dissent, as the case might be. Mr. Brookland was loud and bitter in his lamentations on the unexpected retirement of Lord Derby, of whom he was an enthusiastic admirer and staunch supporter. Without that accomplished statesman at the helm, he believed that the political vessel, with its rich cargo of Tory principles and improvements, would have been dashed to atoms, or at least tossed helplessly upon the sea of discord, till some strong hand could get its head before the wind again. Dr. Reeves, who knew his old friend's strong political bias, dearly loved to indulge in a quiet joke at his expense.

"Derby is a capital fellow," he said; "but, you know, the cleverest pilot sometimes makes a mistake. And certainly you must acknowledge that he carried you right on to the rocks of Reform. The consequences might have been disastrous."

"Not at all," replied Mr. Brookland stoutly. "With his good Tory seamanship, he dexterously avoided the rocks, ran into the harbour protected by his own guns, and silenced the fire of his enemies."

"We have got the right man in the right place now, at any rate," exclaimed Mr. Craig. "Dizzy's the fellow to give a good sound tonic to the British constitution, which has been feeble and shaky for a long time past."

"You are an admirer of Disraeli?" exclaimed Dr. Reeves, smiling with mild benignity.

"Rather," replied Mr. Craig; "I helped to make him what he is. But for my exertions, he would never have been Prime Minister."

At this bold assertion all eyes were turned upon him with a polite, though half incredulous, expression of inquiry.

"Yes," he added, "I daresay it sounds odd, but I have written whole reams of paper about him and his doings. I called attention to every step he took, and chronicled every

act of his life. I trotted him out, and showed his paces and his good points to a discriminating public. To use figurative language, I made a kind of serpentine road through the lines of the public press, and you see where he is!"

"Like the hero of Planche's fairy-tale, 'you were indeed a most obliging adder, to turn your scaly back into a scaling-ladder,' on which the Premier has climbed to fortune."

"That was a cruel thrust," exclaimed Mr. Joel Craig. "I see you do not believe me; nevertheless, what I say is true. I was in the lobby of the House on the occasion of the very last division, and I cheered him till I was hoarse. He did me the honour to shake hands with me. 'Tell me how I can serve you, Craig,' he said; 'it must be a wide ditch I would not jump to serve such a friend as you.'"

A reproving glance from Mr. Brookland arrested the answer that sprang to Margaret's lips. He always looked displeased when she attempted to throw any ridicule or doubt on the general accuracy of the sayings and doings of Mr. Joel Craig, of whom he himself entertained so high an opinion. Drifting away from personalities, the conversation upon the affairs of Church and State was resumed. Mr. Creamly, who had been silent the whole of dinner-time, thinking, as his admiring wife would say, "eloquent thoughts," startled his neighbour by firing his opinion into her ear, saying slowly, in a loud voice,—

"I do not think we have much to fear, so long as we have got Whalley in the House of Commons."

"Whalley!" repeated Mr. Brookland, in profound disgust—"I think it is a great pity that such men are allowed to take up the valuable time of the house with their asinine braying. I have suffered from the infliction, and I know what it is."

Dr. Reeves, with mild Christianity, took the part of his parliamentary friend.

"I think you are unjust to Whalley," he said. "I consider him a staunch supporter of the Church; if he does little good, at least he does no harm, and that is something."

"Or nothing," replied Mr. Brookland. "I consider the Church is in great jeopardy, Reeves, and such men as Whalley cannot support it,"

"It stands on the Rock of Ages, and needs no human support," replied Dr. Reeves. "Depend upon it, all that is wrong will soon be set right. The Pan-Anglican Alliance will put all crooked matters straight."

Those who were interested in political affairs kept the ball of conversation well up in that direction, touching lightly on many subjects, but seriously discussing none. Those who were not interested were considerably bored, and took the earliest opportunity to slide off to other more congenial matters. Mrs. Creamly was seated opposite to Lucy, and kept up a continued buzz upon the degenerate state of society. Her sense of propriety had been seriously outraged that day. She had positively heard the draper's daughter playing the piano, and speaking French—hence her reiterated demand, or rather bemoaning,—

"What is society coming to? All people are educated above their station. Every wealthy or even petty tradesman, to whom money is no object, brings out his daughter ready accomplished, and hangs her on to the skirts of society, and by means of one artifice and another pushes her into the circle; while the real well-born, well-bred gentry, who are reduced in circumstances, struggle through a slough of despond and poverty, and stand shivering on the threshold. You should have heard that girl play this morning—it was positively disgusting; she played with as much execution, taste, and feeling, as I do myself."

"You evidently would not encourage music among the million," said the gentleman she addressed, as soon as he could edge in a word.

"Certainly not," she answered emphatically.

"But I think music humanises and elevates the mind," he answered.

"If they want music they can go to church and hear the organ. As for elevating, they need no elevating; it would be a more Christian kindness to teach them humility. That is a lesson which is most needed, for I assure you I have seen a mere farmer's daughter give herself as many airs as a lady with sixteen quarterings."

"Perhaps more," he answered again. "You remember the old adage, 'The tree that is most heavily laden bends nearest to the ground.' I do not exactly agree with that, though,

for I think pride, vanity, and all other evils, as well as good, are scattered pretty evenly among high and low, rich and poor. Really, if a man or woman either is well educated or well mannered, and has either wit, talent, or any other agreeability to bring into society, I see no reason why he should not be admitted ; it would be rather a gain on both sides. If we reckon up all the dull, dreary gatherings we enjoy during a single season, we must own we have a great deal to learn in the way of wit and pleasantry."

"Oh! I see," she answered—"for the sake of a little dash and sparkle, you would shake the foundation of society, and vitiate the whole system?"

"Not at all," he answered; "I should like to infuse a little fresh blood in it, that is all. I would not exclude any one from a place in what is called 'good society,' if they had the power to win themselves an honourable place in it." Mrs. Creamly sighed piteously.

"Ah, that is the most lamentable thing of all! Old county families, people of position, like yourself, who ought to set an example, and keep up the dignity of society, are the first to let it run down. In order to indulge in some sudden freak of fancy, they admit within their doors people who ought to stand and curtsy at the gate. I have often discussed the matter with Mr. Brookland. Dear Margaret is very young, and, I do not think, quite so exclusive as she should be."

Mrs. Creamly, while she was speaking, looked studiously away from Lucy, and never cast a single glance upon her face ; but she took care that every word she uttered should reach Lucy's ear. But they all fell harmless and unheeded. At any other time Lucy might have taken up the gauntlet, and entered into a civil war of words ; and by a sharp stroke of satire, have cut down her malice, and destroyed her argument. But she was too miserable to think or care for anything now. Indeed, she did not quite comprehend what was passing round her—she seemed to be listening to a mere collection of words, to which she attached no importance, no meaning. What little thought she had, she gave to him, and him only. He was by her side, talking to her between whiles, saying little pleasant nothings, and behaving altogether exactly as nineteen men out of twenty would behave

to a pretty girl who happened to be his neighbour at a dinner-table. It would have been better if he had not spoken to her at all, for the sound of his voice, and the soft expression of his large blue eyes, irritated and stung her to the quick. She was suffering from a sort of mental nightmare. If she could have screamed aloud, or given any outward vent to the feelings that were smouldering and burning within her, she would have awakened up and been herself again. But that she dared not do. She was obliged to sit there and seem calm, to look smiling and interested, or she would have been worried with inquiries. Or if she had made that common excuse, a headache, she would only have roused remark, and been pestered with remedies. So she sat still, bearing her dull smothered pain in silence. There could be no more perfect bar to the outward expression of a wild impulsive nature than that magic circle of smiling faces which surrounded her then. She could not, she dared not move a step out of the common groove. No chains could have more effectually bound her limbs than that invisible atmosphere of polite society bound her spirit.

At last the dinner, which had seemed to her interminable, was over. Margaret worked the silent smiling telegraph round the table. There was a momentary hush in the conversation, a stir among the ladies, a soft rustling of silks, and one by one they left the room. Lucy had a dim consciousness that Mr. Brookland's grand old grey head had bowed to her, as he spoke some courteous words, as she passed out of the open door. She felt so utterly miserable at that moment, that the sympathetic expression of his kind eyes sent the tears with a rush to her own. They crossed the hall, went up the wide staircase, along the grand corridor, laughing, chatting, and making remarks on Margaret's dead ancestors as they went along. Arrived at the green drawing-room, which was rarely used except on such occasions as the present, Lucy thought she would be left to herself, and might escape observation, perhaps steal down the marble steps and away into the pine wood, where she could be alone, free from the sound of human voices, and from the trammels of society, able to breathe freely, even to sob aloud if she pleased, with no one but God to hear her. She felt hot and feverish, as though a furnace were burning within

her, scorching up the green freshness of her life. The sweet air of heaven would cool her brow and calm her spirit. It was a soft warm summer evening, and the skies were flooded with the light of the full moon. She seated herself as far away from the rest of the company as she possibly could, and busied herself examining and admiring a portfolio of choice prints. She had not been so occupied long, when Mrs. Creamly came purring to her side.

"Do you think you are prudent to sit so near the open window? See, the dews are falling," she said.

"Thank you, I like it," replied Lucy, glancing up with a slight irritability of manner; for she did not like being interrupted, especially by Mrs. Creamly, for whom her affection by no means increased on a closer acquaintance. "Leave it open, please; when I feel cool, I will close it, or move away."

"It will be too late then, my dear—all the mischief will be done," replied Mrs. Creamly. "When you feel cool, it is a sure sign that the cold is already caught, and there is no knowing where it will carry you; for it may end in a galloping consumption or an early grave."

"I do not know that there would be any great calamity in that," replied Lucy. "You know 'Whom the gods love, die young.'"

"That is a heathenish saying," said Mrs. Creamly; "as though any reasonable gods would not love the old, who had gone through trials and done their duty, better than the young, who have fluttered like butterflies through their days—merely lived and died. It is the object of every Christian to live a life of usefulness, and struggle on to beautiful and grand old age."

"I do not see anything grand or beautiful about it!" exclaimed Lucy. "Nobody likes to grow old. To me old age is simply the absence of pleasure, and the presence of limitless pain—such as aching bones, feeble limbs, dim eyes, and bad digestion. Bah! I hope I shall never live to grow old!" She shut the portfolio with a sharp snap, as though she was closing the leaves of her life.

"I look on the approach of age with the eyes of a Christian," replied Mrs. Creamly. "Whenever it comes, I shall open my arms to give it welcome."

"A wise and prudent resolution," replied Lucy. "You are willing to embrace an evil when it can no longer be avoided. After all, when the first plunge is over, I daresay you do not feel it. Dear Mrs. Creamly, do tell me what was your state of mind when you first felt you were growing old?"

"I have not felt that yet, Miss Nutford," she answered, with some severity. "I am not old, although I wear glasses—it is owing to my near sight, and has nothing to do with age. I have always worn them—indeed, I may say I was born in spectacles. My dear, you must have an odd notion of age—I am not yet eight and thirty."

"Really!—only that!" exclaimed Lucy; "people carry their age so differently. Of course, I am no judge; but seriously, Mrs. Creamly, I should have thought you were nearly fifty."

"You are the first person who ever said as much as that," replied Mrs. Creamly.

"Ah! but who knows how many may have thought it?" replied Lucy. "People often use their tongues to disguise their thoughts; and I have not been in polite society long enough to learn the trick of hiding mine. There are some women, I have heard," she added, looking smilingly in Mrs. Creamly's face, "who are ashamed of their age, and do all sorts of horrible things to hide it; but I know you are superior to any such folly, or I should not have spoken so freely."

No matter how amicably the meeting between Mrs. Creamly and Lucy began, it always ended in hidden dagger thrusts or tiny stabs wreathed in polite words, that always struck home. There was something in both their natures that would not amalgamate. Sometimes they approached each other under cover of polite society, really with an intention to be agreeable; but some hidden spring in the mind of one or other exploded silently, and sent them as far as ever asunder. That was the case now. Mrs. Creamly had addressed Lucy with all seeming friendliness, but her soft purring manner was generally offensive to the girl, especially on this occasion, for she felt she was being watched, and that Mrs. Creamly's inquiry, under the mask of friendly anxiety, was dictated by pure officiousness.

More than once, during dinner, Lucy had caught Mrs. Creamly's eye, and she knew she had been talking at her, though at the time she had neither the wit nor the spirit to reply; and it must be owned she dreaded the scrutinising spirit of Mrs. Creamly above anything else at Brooklands. She had no fear of Margaret, from whose frank, unsuspecting eyes, she could hide whatever she wished; but she could not conceal anything from Mrs. Creamly, whose prying officious nature penetrated everywhere, and into everything. Nothing escaped her; it was her common boast, that if she got the remotest clue to any mystery, or seeming mystery, she never rested till she had unravelled the whole. Hence Lucy determined, so far as she and Joel Craig were concerned, to baffle her. Not a word, not a glance, should pass between them that might not be exchanged by the mere companions of an hour. The time was passing. It was already ten o'clock, and they kept early hours at Brooklands; the company would soon be going. Till then she determined to be herself, and indeed she roused her half-numbed faculties, and was more than herself. She dashed into whatever conversation was passing, made little pointed remarks, and illustrated the opinions that were expressed with sharp sayings, graphic word-painting, that drew Mrs. Creamly's attention.

"I am delighted to see you in such good spirits," she said. "I thought you seemed strange and nervous during dinner. I do not mean ill exactly, but you looked pale one moment and flushed the next. I never heard the sound of your voice, and you know, my dear, you are not generally famed for silence, quite the reverse. Some people might say you were too fond of talking."

"But I could not talk then," replied Lucy. "I was better engaged listening to you. I know you were talking for my special edification."

"As a rule, Miss Nutford, I have observed that you would rather shine yourself than be edified by another."

"So I would; but how could I hope my poor little twinkling lamp would shine when there were so many brilliant lights sparkling—I was going to say spluttering round me!"

"Lucy, dear," exclaimed Margaret, breaking in upon the

conversation, "Mrs. Reeves is very anxious to hear you sing, and I have promised you will oblige her."

"Perhaps, when you have heard me, you will change your mind as to the obligation," replied Lucy, turning to the old lady with a pleased smile. "Margaret is under a sweet delusion respecting my voice; she thinks it is better than it really is."

"Indeed I do not think so much of your voice," replied Margaret. "It is your style and manner of singing that I like."

"Ah! there is a great deal in taste and feeling," said Mrs. Reeves. "In my time I have heard some charming singing with very indifferent voices. Pathos and expression will find their way to the heart, when a grand voice reaches the ear only."

"That would be my ambition," exclaimed Lucy, enthusiastically. "If I were a great singer, I would rather, a thousand times, touch the heart than delight the ear. A suppressed sigh, or a single silent tear, is a greater tribute to a singer's power than the applause of a thousand hands. I myself would sooner stir one buried memory in an old man's life, than rouse the admiration of an audience of fops."

Lucy spoke with earnest enthusiasm in her voice, and a soft dew in her eyes, for her thoughts flew back to the dear old father at home, who so loved to hear her sing. "There was something," he used to say, "in the tone of her voice, that brought back his dead youth to him, and revived the thoughts and feelings of the old days long ago." Many other things, of the past and of the present, which it would take a long time to explain or write down, flashed across Lucy's mind. Her lip quivered, and for a second she felt she had lost the control of her voice. Mrs. Reeves fancied she was moved by her own enthusiasm, and looked on her with increased kindness, saying,—

"I am sure you have the true soul for music. Come, let me choose you a song, I am longing to hear you." As she spoke she turned to the table, where stood a pile of music. Lucy laid her hand detainingly upon her, saying in a low, earnest voice,—

"Not to-night, please excuse me. I do not feel exactly in the right mood."

"I can easily understand that," exclaimed Mrs. Creamly, who, if a thing was not intended for her ear, was sure to hear it; "and really, dear Mrs. Reeves, it is hardly fair to ask Miss Nutford to sing yet. I daresay, when the gentlemen come up, she will be more inclined to oblige us. You know most young ladies consider all good things thrown away upon women."

"Upon some women all good things are thrown away," exclaimed Lucy, coolly. "You evidently indulge in reminiscences of your own early days, and judge others by yourself. If it will really give you any pleasure," she added, addressing Mrs. Reeves almost affectionately, "and you will excuse my shortcomings, I will sing to you now; but if you will come down some morning, I know Margaret will be delighted to see you, and I will sing to you as long as you please, all those dear old ballads that I am sure you love so well; though I am well aware they will owe their chief charm to association, rather than to my interpretation."

While they were still talking, and turning the music over, the gentlemen joined them. Tea was brought in, and with the gentlemen came light fresh subjects for pleasant conversation; and so the rest of the evening was whiled away. One by one the few guests departed, and the last "good-night" was said.

Mr. Brookland and Mr. Craig followed them out into the hall. When Lucy found herself alone with Margaret, she said,—

"I am so tired, dear, I think I shall go to bed at once. I do not feel inclined to sit up talking to-night, especially as there is a stranger here."

"Pray do just as you like, dear," returned Margaret. "I shall only wait for a nice long good-night of papa, and then follow you, and we will have a cosy chat to ourselves."

Lucy would gladly have dispensed even with Margaret's conversation, but that she could not do. She resolved, however, to detain her as short a time as possible, for she felt unequal to their usual gay gossip on this night. Somehow it seemed as though she had fallen away from Margaret, and must take time to climb into her old place again. Presently, wrapped in a light dressing-gown, with hair hanging loosely

over her shoulders, and dainty slippers feet, Margaret came softly into her room.

"I have sent Foster to bed," she exclaimed. "I thought I would finish undressing here; for I have hardly had you to myself for a moment all day, and I want to know what you have been about."

"Dear Margaret," replied Lucy, "I am afraid you will find me very poor company now, for I have a terrible headache."

"I am so sorry," exclaimed Margaret, sympathetically; "let me bathe it with some Eau de Cologne."

"That would be no use," replied Lucy; "rest is the only thing that will do me any good. I daresay I shall be all right to-morrow."

"I am sure I hope so, dear. I wonder what could have given you this tiresome headache. Have you been walking in the sun? What were you doing while we were out to-day? Ah! now I have caught you, naughty child! you little thought I should find out all your wickedness!" She put her arm caressingly round Lucy's neck, and looked with a reproachful smile into her face. The tender caressing motion and the smile were both alike lost on Lucy; she heard only the words, and replied to them with a slight tremor in her voice, and a fear at her heart.

"Margaret, what can you mean?—found me out in what?" but while she spoke, she avoided looking in Margaret's eyes.

"Oh, I know," she answered. "We are all apt to do naughty things, Lucy, but this is the very naughtiest thing possible. Oh! Lucy, Lucy, how could you? If anything goes wrong, your father will never forgive us."

"How could I? What?" exclaimed Lucy half angrily; "but, after all, what is it I have done?"

"What!" repeated Margaret, "why, you have run into terrible danger. Do you know we met Dr. Grey in the town, and he says he is afraid it will turn to typhus."

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Lucy, with a strangely puzzled look in her face.

"Jemmy Burton's measles, of course," replied Margaret. "I know you have been down there to take him that box of soldiers. It was very kind of you, dear, but very imprudent,

for, as I told you, the doctor says it is turning to typhus—and—and, Lucy dear, your cheeks are flushed, and your eyes look watery and feverish! I shall speak to papa. If you have caught the infection, what shall we do?"

"No, no, Margaret; rest easy, I am in no danger of anything of that kind. I went to Burton's cottage early in the morning, and then no further than the door. I merely inquired for the child, left the toys with his mother, and came away again. My headache has nothing to do with that. If I can get a good night's rest, I shall be all right in the morning," said Lucy, with a sigh of unutterable relief. Margaret, too, was better satisfied.

"Well, if you went no further than the door, I daresay it is all right; but it is lucky papa does not know even that, or he would have brought his favourite battery to bear upon you, hung you in galvanic chains, and opened fire with his great gun. He would have drenched you with camphor water, and smothered you in globules. But how thoughtless I am! As your head aches, perhaps my talking disturbs you? If it does, only say so, and I will go away directly."

"Oh! no; it does not disturb me, dear, only I am not inclined to talk, that is all," replied Lucy.

"Ah! well, that is a pity, for I thought we should have a nice long chat about Mr. Craig."

"Keep him in reserve," replied Lucy; "we shall be better able to do him justice to-morrow."

"I fancy he is fully inclined to do you justice to-night," rejoined Margaret archly, "for I heard him say you were a charming girl, and ask papa how long you were going to stay at Brooklands."

Lucy's heart bounded, but she turned away her face.

"Do you know what papa answered?" added Margaret. "He said, if you stayed till we were tired of you, you would never go away at all."

"You are too kind, too good to me—you and your father both," replied Lucy, as she threw her arms round Margaret's neck, and dismissed her with a fond good-night.



CHAPTER XVI.

AWAKENING UP.

“Your thief looks in the crowd
Exactly like the rest, or rather better ;
'Tis only at the bar and in the dungeon
That wise men know your felon by his features.”

HOW incapable we are of estimating our own weakness, or measuring our own strength ! We are apt to think the one is so much less than it is, the other so much greater. We see our cross before us, and we lift it up and struggle hopefully on, striving to bear it bravely to the end, or until it shall please God to relieve us of it. Sometimes our very bravery in bearing it renders our struggle lighter, and with the occasion comes the strength to suffer. But that very trial which invigorates one spirit, enfeebles another, and it grows fainter and fainter with every step, while the cross grows heavier and harder to bear ; the spirit languishes, the feet grow tremulous, and a cry goes forth for help, either to God or man, and as surely help comes either from within or without. We are too often in the habit of overrating our own trials, and underrating those of other people ; we feel causes and effects so differently. That which lies like a heavy cloud on one man's life, is light as gossamer to another ; and that sorrow which will drench a young spirit with tears, awakens but a passing sigh from maturer age. The child's great grief is a trifle to a man, his boyish distresses or disappointments create impatience or

rebuke ; and yet the sorrow of a child disappointed of a brief bright holiday is, comparatively, as bitter as that of the man who is disappointed in greater things.

Lucy Nutford had certainly overrated her strength, and perhaps her trial at the same time ; but to her the sorrow was none the less bitter. She had fancied that she and Joel Craig would be able to live in the same house together, and behave to each other with the courtesy of mere acquaintances—indeed, they were little more than that now. It might perhaps be a little hard at first, she thought, but it would grow easier every day. So in her foolish pride she imagined, but in reality it grew harder every hour. She never saw him alone. They seemed by common consent to avoid every opportunity of a private *tête-à-tête*, but, of course, they were thrown a good into one another's society, though they were alone together in the social daily life at Brooklands. His manner was as free, his conversation as pointed as usual, and he was always an agreeable companion. Both to Lucy and Margaret he behaved with the same courteous, unvarying attention, and to the master of Brooklands his companionship seemed almost indispensable. His influence was gaining a great ascendancy over Mr. Brookland, there was no doubt of that. The books were catalogued, the coins and manuscripts arranged—still he stayed on, and there was no talk of his going away. Margaret in her heart was impatient at his long visit, for there were times when she wanted her father more entirely to herself ; they had been together all their lives, sharing each other's confidence to the full, exchanging thoughts and feelings, hopes and wishes, until their hearts seemed to beat in unison together. She used to nestle at his feet, and send her thoughts forth into wonder-land, build airy castles on the plains of the future, and people them with sweet phantasies ; and the old man's grey head would bow down and listen to her playful prattle. He in his turn, too, would tell her of his own battles in the old days, and how the great King Time brought a host of experiences to bear upon him, attacking and carrying his positions one by one, till he was driven out of wonder-land, far from the flowery fields of imagination into the colder regions of reality ; and he told her what he found there. But those pleasant days seemed to be over now, they were

so seldom alone together. It was no wonder she grew impatient of the restraint, and somewhat jealous of the stranger who had come between them, and thrust them apart, outwardly, at least; but she made no remark—she only rebelled silently.

"After all," she argued, "if his visit here makes papa happy, why should I complain? Dear old father! He makes many sacrifices for me!"

The presence of Lucy at Brooklands would have made little or no difference in the intercourse between father and daughter. Lucy was fond of being alone, and sometimes remained in her own room all the morning, or wandered out in the grounds for hours together, leaving Margaret to her own resources, and they were both content.

There were times however, when Margaret was perplexed by Lucy's behaviour to Mr. Joel Craig. There was a something in her tone for which Margaret could ill account. To Lucy Mr. Craig's conduct was a constant course of irritation. If he had gone right away when the first blow was struck, her wound might have healed; but he stayed, and kept it open. Sometimes a word, a look, a tone, carried her back to the old days, and sent a flood of recollections to her heart that for a while drowned her anger; her heart swelled, and a great sob would rise in her throat, but with a strong gulp she sent it back.

Oh! if he would but have spoken then!—a few words would have been enough to reconcile her to herself and to him; but he was courteously, studiously polite, and that was hardest to bear.

As time passed on, she began to think that perhaps her pride had risen in arms too quickly, and led her to judge too hastily. After all, he might have some show of right on his side; the past was evidently not a pleasant page to him, and perhaps he had some good reason for wishing it to be closed for ever, that he might not carry the misconception and trouble of the old life into the new. Whatever were his thoughts and wishes, he surely might have trusted *her*! Then a whisper rose in her heart that she might have trusted *him*! If he had given the slightest indication that he wished to re-open the subject—to explain himself more fully—she would have met him half-way; but he wrapped himself in a mantle

of reserve, and made no sign of unloosing it. She was too proud, too delicate to put forth her hand while his was folded, or to speak a tempting word to lead his thoughts where she would have them go. Thus, in no enviable state of mind, she struggled on from day to day, alternately irritated and angry, or sad and miserable. She began to wish she had never come to Brooklands. She was fast losing her old relish for Margaret's sweet companionship; for when they were together, she felt bitterly the pangs of self-reproach. She knew she was acting a double part—the part of a base hypocrite! Having known and loved the man, she kept all knowledge of him secret, and bore a sort of silent, treacherous part in the action of social life at Brooklands. How she hated herself! Sometimes she longed to throw herself on Margaret's neck and tell her all; but some strong condemning power held her back. She could not, she dared not tell the proud, pure Margaret that the friend she loved and trusted had so meanly deceived her, and had been daily and hourly acting a lie! If she had only taken time for reflection at the first, before she had entered into this slough of false seeming, she never would have consented to be silent and to keep her former acquaintance (to call it by no warmer name) with Mr. Joel Craig a secret. But she fancied it was too late to think regretfully of that now; he would soon be leaving Brooklands, and then things would settle down and be the same as they were before—at least, she comforted herself with that hope. She persuaded herself that she wished him to be gone, yet in her inmost heart she dreaded his departure, though this she would not acknowledge even to herself. His business at Brooklands was finished, but there seemed to be no prospect of the end of his visit. Both girls thought over the matter, and wondered when he would take his leave; but neither spoke of the subject to the other. Indeed, for some little time his name seemed to have dropt out of their conversation. At first Margaret had been inclined to discuss him fully, but Lucy did not respond to her playful sallies or her grave remarks. Indeed, the subject of Mr. Craig was evidently not especially agreeable to Lucy, and therefore Margaret avoided it altogether. But of course she put her own construction upon Lucy's reserved and shrinking manner.

One morning the two girls were seated together in the deep bay window of the dining-room, which gave upon a delicious bit of park scenery ; and Margaret wheeled a little table into the recess, got out her drawing materials, and was soon busily engaged sketching it. Lucy was lounging in a low swing chair opposite, with a volume of poetry, "The Life and Death of Jason," in her hand. Occasionally, when anything particularly pleased her, she read it aloud. There had been silence between them for some minutes. Margaret, still holding her pencil listlessly between her fingers, paused in her work, and gazed out upon the figures of her father and Mr. Craig, who were walking, apparently in earnest conversation, within a hundred yards of the window. The gravel crunched and crackled beneath their feet as they paced slowly up and down. A cloud gathered in Margaret's eyes, and by degrees shadowed her whole countenance and rested there. For a time she was absent and absorbed in thought. Presently she turned to Lucy, who seemed engrossed with her book, and observed, carelessly,—

"Mr. Craig seems to enjoy his visit here."

"Evidently," replied Lucy, without raising her eyes ; "or he would not stay so long."

"Yes, he certainly *has* been here a long time," said Margaret ; "I hope he will not outstay his welcome." Then she blushed, as though she had said something wrong in remarking on the length of one visitor's stay in the presence of another ; and with a natural delicacy, fearing lest Lucy might feel her remark in the smallest degree, and apply it to herself, she added, affectionately, "I mean a long time for him, dear, for you know he came here to perform a certain work for papa. He was a stranger to us until the meeting of the Archæological Institute. Papa invited him here purely on a matter of business."

"But he seems to be staying on as a pure matter of pleasure," replied Lucy. "Things often begin in one way and end in another."

"Yes, papa seems to be making him his chief friend and *confidant*," replied Margaret ; "and yet I doubt if it is entirely for papa's pleasure he is staying on."

"One rarely does anything entirely for another's pleasure," said Lucy. "I daresay he is studying his own convenience

as well—his own pleasure too, of course ; for he must feel as I do, that this is a charming place to stay at. Never was such a kind host as your father, or such a sweet hostess as yourself, Margaret.”

“Oh ! I go for nothing,” she answered. “I am not in the least responsible for his stay ; but *you*, oh ! Lucy, you must have observed something different in his tone and manner lately, especially to *you*.”

“To me ?” repeated Lucy, now flushing to the roots of her hair. “No, indeed, I have noticed nothing. I should not take the trouble to decipher Mr. Craig’s tone or manner—why should I ?”

“Because,” said Margaret, hesitatingly—“well, Lucy, because—because I think he cares for you a great deal more than for any other young lady of his acquaintance—there ! I have thought so some time, and I have said it now !”

For a second a feeling of exquisite pleasure thrilled Lucy to the heart ; but it died away in a low throb of pain as she answered earnestly,—

“You are quite wrong—he does not care for me in the least.”

“I am quite right,” said Margaret, “and that time will show. Of course it is only natural you should pretend ignorance, until the magic words are spoken. It would never do to make sure of a man’s intentions until he has himself acknowledged them ; but I see plainly how things will be.”

“You see things that have no existence, except in your own brain, dear,” replied Lucy, trying to smile pleasantly ; but Margaret was not so easily silenced.

“But I have taken a glimpse into the magic mirror, Lucy, and seen a little bit of your future reflected there,” she added, archly ; “and I was thinking yesterday what a beautiful bride you would be, and he—well, I must own he is handsome, dear ; but mind, I am to be chief bridesmaid, and choose the dresses, or I will never give my consent.” She paused for a second ; then, in a tone of deep feeling, added, “Ah ! Lucy dear, I see why fate sent you to Brooklands. How proud your father will be of such a son-in-law !” She was almost startled by the vehemence of Lucy’s reply, and by the expression of deep pain that contracted her features as she said,—

"My dear father!—do not speak of him, Margaret, pray do not! If you knew how your foolish talk hurt me, you would rather bite your tongue out than let it run upon such silly matter. Margaret, dear, seriously, once for all, let me assure you Mr. Craig is not, nor ever will be, anything to me. You are quite wrong in your suspicions; he is as indifferent to me as—as I am to him."

Margaret felt she had touched upon some tender chord that vibrated painfully on Lucy's memory. Perhaps she had suffered from some cruel disappointment, and the words Margaret thoughtlessly uttered had stirred the ashes of some old love that was buried, but not dead. However, upon that subject she made neither comment nor remark, and without noticing Lucy's painful excitement, answered,—

"Well, I am glad of that, Lucy; for do you know I fancied that since Mr. Craig came down you were somewhat changed—I cannot exactly tell how, but your old self seems to be lost in a new one. I watched the symptoms, and fancied I had found the disease; but I am glad I was wrong, Lucy, heartily glad."

"Why?" replied Lucy, glancing curiously in her face.

"Well, I cannot exactly say why, because I really have no reason for being either glad or sorry; and yet I *am* glad, I know that. Though it might have been a very good thing for you, Lucy,—he belongs to a fine old family."

"How do you know?" inquired Lucy.

"Oh! papa knows all about him—he is one of the Craigs of Craigee."

"I do not believe it, Margaret. If he says that, he is deceiving you."

"Why, Lucy," exclaimed Margaret, in some surprise, "how emphatically you speak! What can you know about Mr. Joel Craig?"

"Nothing—I know absolutely nothing," replied Lucy; "but I have an instinctive feeling that he is not so upright and honourable a man as you and your kind, true-hearted father suppose." Margaret looked thoughtful and troubled for a moment and then said,—

"To confess the truth, in my secret heart I have a sort of doubt of him myself. Such things will creep into our hearts sometimes, without rhyme or reason. However, to do him

justice, I must own he has done nothing hitherto to give us cause for doubting him in any way. He has become my father's friend, and perhaps I am wrong to give my thoughts words, even to you."

"No, you are quite right!" exclaimed Lucy; "nothing you say to me can be prejudicial to him. I have no power to hurt him, and I would not if I could. I only wish—but there is no use wishing. Have you any idea when he is going to leave Brooklands?"

"There is no talk of it at present," replied Margaret sighing; "and indeed papa seems to have got so accustomed to his society, I really do not know what he would do without him. He will miss him sadly whenever he goes away. Sometimes, I hardly know whether I am glad or sorry he ever came to Brooklands. He is certainly a most agreeable companion, no one can deny that." Lucy made no further response, but again resumed her book. Margaret looked dreamily out upon the two figures who still paced slowly up and down. There was evidently some unuttered thought resting in Margaret's mind, for as she watched them discoursing earnestly together, a shade of anxiety deepened on her brow, as though she was oppressed with some hidden care. She remained for a few moments silent, and then threw aside her drawing implements, saying impatiently,—

"I wish there was no such thing as business in the world, Lucy. I hate to hear people talking of things I do not understand, and that is what papa and Mr. Craig are always doing now."

"I suppose they are discussing the arts and sciences, and making a business of that; some people do," observed Lucy.

"Oh, no; it is all about shares and mines, and inventions and all that sort of thing. Whenever I go into the library I find them poring over papers covered with diagrams and figures. I cannot think what interest papa finds in them, unless indeed he is going to play ducks and drakes with some of the old acres of Brooklands." This was said half in jest, half in earnest; but it fell on Lucy's ear, and wrought a strange commotion in her mind. As a bomb-shell thrown into a sleeping city rouses and calls the inhabitants to arms, so Margaret's words fell on Lucy's slumbering senses, and

roused and called into action a host of strange feelings which had long lain at rest. Fears, doubts, and terrors came swarming up in her mind, overrunning and bewildering her senses. "Make ducks and drakes of the broad acres of Brooklands!" The words rang like a knell above the grave of truth and honour, for in truth her faith in the honour of Mr. Craig was dying fast. She remembered the whispered suspicion and mistrust that clung to his name and wounded his honour in Cornwall; that reports were rife that he had misled his best friend, tempted him into ruinous speculations, and then betrayed him. Her father believed this, and he was slow to believe evil of any man. But she had indignantly repudiated the idea, and hated the good people of Cornwall for daring to cloud the fame of this man whom she had set up as a god, and crowned with the fresh affections of her foolish heart. But he had flung himself from his high place on the night when they had first met at Brooklands. She had tried to lift him up, and twine round him some of the broken tendrils of the old love, but failed miserably. It would be as easy to gather up the scattered acorns, withered leaves, and broken branches of an old oak and build up the tree, and renew its verdure and freshness, as to build up and keep alive the love which has been cast down and stained with the small meannesses of a false spirit. She began now to think that the experience of her father's grey hairs was greater than the green wisdom of her own unripened judgment. There might be some truth in those horrible whispers she had so indignantly rejected. If so, the reason of Mr. Joel Craig's long stay at Brooklands would be easily solved. For the present Lucy let the matter rest, but she determined to watch warily the progress of affairs, and if she saw any foundation for her newly-awakened fears, she would speak out, at any risk to herself or to him, and give due warning to the master of Brooklands.



CHAPTER XVII.

AN INVENTIVE GENIUS.

“Th’ invention all admired, and each how he
To be th’ inventor missed ; so easy it seemed,
Once found, which yet unfound most would have thought
Impossible.”



IN the evening of that day, when they were all together in the drawing-room, Lucy took the opportunity of leading the conversation down to her home in Cornwall. They talked of the beauty and fertility of the country, of the magnificent sea views, and the dangers of the rock-bound coast, round about Penzance and on to the Land’s End. From one thing they went on to another, till she began to fear they would drift hopelessly away from the point whereto she wished to steer.

They told stories of storms and tempests, wrecks and wreckers ; of the heroism of the rough old salts who lounge lazily about the beach when the sea is calm and the skies clear. But let the storm begin, and the men are transfigured. The sea has been their playfellow, the friend and companion of their lives ; for when they were not sporting upon its broad back, it sent its small wavelets murmuring to their cottage doors. They know it in all its changing moods. They see the danger brewing, and know when it will burst, while the landsmen are blind and see nothing ; and they are ready to go forth into the boiling surf and roaring breakers, with their lives in their hands, risking that, which is all they have, striving to pull

the good ship through the storm, or to save the lives of strangers.

From the dauntless bravery of seamen Lucy drew the discourse to the heroism of the miners upon the land, who go unappalled down into the bowels of the earth, and labour amid the double terrors of silence and darkness, with no exciting cries, no clashing elements, to urge them on. Animated by their own steady hearts alone, they strive to save the living, or rescue the dead. Having lived in a mining district all her life, Lucy's mind was full of stirring anecdotes and tales of ruin, successes, and disasters. She wished to bring Mr. Brookland's mind to a contemplation of the last. Mr. Joel Craig expatiated largely upon the world of wealth that was still hidden in the bowels of the earth, which needed only the ingenuity and enterprise of man to bring it forth.

"For my part," he exclaimed, "I think we might cultivate wealth as we cultivate vegetables, and many other things. The earth freely sends forth her rivers and streams, her small wild-flowers and vast forest trees luxuriate on her breast; but her heart, like the heart of a woman, holds her richest treasures; if we want them, we must seek them there. At this very moment I know of a capital thing in the shape of a copper-mine in Cornwall. It belongs to a friend of mine; poor fellow, he is being completely ruined for want of money."

"That is by no means an uncommon occurrence," exclaimed Margaret; "many people are ruined for want of the same thing."

"And some are ruined through having too much of it," rejoined Lucy.

"That sounds paradoxical," said Mr. Brookland. "How can a man be ruined through too many riches?"

"In many ways," replied Lucy; "but more especially easy in one way—through not knowing what to do with them. A rich man sometimes enters into speculations that prove ruinous; a poor man is never tempted that way."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Craig, candidly; "there are few things more dangerous than indiscriminate speculations; but, of course, there are some that answer the

wildest expectations. Now my friend, for instance, if he had only funds to sink a shaft a few fathoms lower, make a cross cut about fifty feet westwards, he would come upon a veritable mine of wealth, in the shape of copper ore. But his hands are tied, and the fortunes of a thousand men lie buried within half a mile of his garden wall."

"I know a great deal about the Cornish mines," exclaimed Lucy; "they are very poor, and many of them literally worked out. In sinking a shaft, you sink a fortune; and, nineteen times out of twenty, lose it, too."

"Well, *I* am sanguine upon the point in question," said Mr. Craig; "but Mr. Brookland has no more faith in copper than you have."

"I am glad of that," replied Lucy; "and I hope he will have no faith in brass either, or he might find it a faith betrayed."

"Some people have no faith in anything," said Mr. Craig; "and without some faith in ourselves, great faith in each other and in the things around us, the world would degenerate into barbarism, and life would scarcely be worth living for. I fancy yours is rather a sceptical nature, Miss Nutford."

"Why? Because I do not believe in you." Her lip curled slightly as she spoke; she could not prevent it.

"Oh! pray do not overwhelm me with such an amount of accumulated scorn!" he exclaimed in mock alarm. "You are always hard upon me, but to-night you seem inclined to be harder than usual. Any one might suppose we were playing a game of cross purposes."

"And so perhaps you are," exclaimed Margaret; "only you call it by a different name."

"By-the-bye," said Mr. Brookland, who had been silent for a few moments, as though making a mental calculation, "have you spoken to my daughter about that little invention of yours?"

"Well, no, I have not," he replied. "I should hardly venture to intrude my small inventions upon Miss Brookland—at least, until they were worthy of her attention."

"Ay, but very important results arise from small matters," said Mr. Brookland; "and I think your scheme is exceedingly novel and ingenious, and if carefully and

skilfully carried out, cannot fail to be highly productive. All Europe will be a-blaze with it."

"But what is it, papa?" exclaimed Margaret.

"Well, my child, I do not sufficiently understand the matter to explain it, but ——"

"Then, Mr. Craig, I call upon you to tell us all about it," exclaimed Margaret impatiently. "What have you invented?"

"Really, Miss Brookland," he answered, "I dare hardly call mine an invention yet—it is but a crude idea; but if I can carry it out satisfactorily, I have no doubt it will be a very good thing."

"He has invented a home-made gas, my dear," rejoined Mr. Brookland, "manufactured entirely out of beef-bones, candle-ends, and the soles of old shoes, by which you can illuminate a mansion at the average rate of five farthings per night."

"My dear papa, pray do not have anything to do with such dangerous work—we may end by illuminating ourselves. Where is this wonderful gas to be seen, Mr. Craig?"

"It is only in embryo at present," he answered; "but I hope it will soon burst forth and astonish the world."

"I had no idea you were an inventive genius," said Margaret. "You are coming out in quite a new character."

"A new character!" he repeated; "by no means. I have invented more things than I can very well enumerate. I have taken out a patent for extracting oil out of potatoe peelings; but it did not answer—I had not capital to carry out my design. The fact is, my ideas have been cruelly pirated; other men have seized them, and literally made their fortunes out of my brains. But in this age people are mean-spirited and avaricious. They drive a man mad with jeers and scoffing, and then seize their invention and make it their own. People, especially rich people, have mean, grovelling ideas about money. They will not engage in any speculation till they are sure it will pay, then they dribble out a few paltry hundreds, and the thing creeps on in a maimed, crippled sort of way, and at last, literally dies of exhaustion. Nobody loses anything, nobody gains, and the world is none the better for its brief existence. The heart of enterprise cannot beat, unless there is a free circulation

of red gold through its various veins and arteries. If the wealthy world supplied the sinews of war, the intellectual would carry it on, and win such scientific victories as would make the world wonder. But the fact is, the human mind is corroded with mistrust and suspicion; men have no faith in each other. Gold looks askant at genius, and genius is too proud to beg; it starves and dies, and a world of intellect is buried, while a world of folly rolls on."

"There is no doubt that many a noble scheme falls to the ground for want of proper support," said Mr. Brookland. "Look at Snider, how he was poohpoohed and laughed down for years; and Armstrong, too. Every jackanapes and wooden-headed wiseacres of the war-office, treated his first efforts with silent contempt; they jeered, laughed, and at last suffered him to try his experiments, and he did so amid solemn head-shaking and prognostications of failure. Now! his great gun roars out and echoes through the land."

"But to come nearer to your own knowledge and experience," said Mr. Craig. "Look at galvanism! Though you and I acknowledge the truth of its principle, one half the world is deriding it still."

Mr. Craig now led Mr. Brookland off on his own peculiar hobbies, and they sat talking till long after the midnight closed in. The girls sat listening and ill at ease, throwing in a comment now and then, but carefully, being guarded in what they said for fear of vexing Mr. Brookland, who was tetchy when his hobbies were in question. Looking from one to the other, a wonder would arise how the old grey-headed courteous gentleman was won over to repose so much confidence in his young dashing companion. But Mr. Brookland was one of those high-souled, pure-minded men who measure the hearts of others by their own. He was guileless himself, and believed no guile of others. He had his life's lesson yet to learn. He was wise and learned too, in his way; he had studied books and was versed in the lore of the old world. Mr. Joel Craig had studied men, and was versed in the ways of the new. Mr. Brookland was made to walk in the ways of honour with honourable men; he could not understand—he was unable to cope with the reverse. Indeed he was one of those peculiarly constituted

men, who if they were betrayed nine times, he would trust the tenth and run the risk of being betrayed again.

Before retiring to rest he informed Margaret that he and Mr. Craig were going up to town in the morning on business, and might be absent two or three days. They were going to see about the patent, and the getting up a company for the sole manufacture of Mr. Craig's "Gas."

"I hope it will not turn out 'laughing gas,'" she said.

"Indeed I hope it will, if those laugh who win; for then the laughter will be all on our side," rejoined Mr. Craig.

Strange to say, when the girls went up to bed they found, or seemed to find, so many small matters for conversation, they talked no more of Mr. Joel Craig, and made no allusion to the discussion that had taken place between him and Mr. Brookland.

The next morning Lucy was up early, and wandering about the park as soon as the household was stirring. She had slept little during the night, but had lain awake debating with herself what she ought to do. Her cogitations ended by a determination to seek an interview with Mr. Joel Craig before he left with Mr. Brookland for London. The carriage, which was to take them to the station, was not ordered till two o'clock. That would be after luncheon. She would surely find an opportunity of having a private interview with him before that. Although they had hitherto seemed to avoid each other, she felt no delicacy in seeking him now. It was not for her own sake she sought him, but for another's. All the morning, until near luncheon-time, he and Mr. Brookland were closeted together, apparently discussing some important subject. Still she watched and waited. Then she began to fancy the morning would slip away without giving her the opportunity she sought. However, about half an hour before luncheon was served, Margaret tapped at the library door. On entering she found the table covered with papers, over which the two gentlemen were eagerly poring.

"Come, papa," she exclaimed, "you are going to play truant for the next two or three days, so I must have you for an hour's lounge by the lake before you start."

The old man looked up and smiled as his daughter's sunny face beamed upon him, and his smile reflected back

some of her own brightness. He put aside the papers and rose from his chair, saying,—

“We may reconsider this matter in town—I daresay we may have some spare hours.”

Father and daughter went out together. Lucy watched her light dress fluttering among the trees, and then turned to the library and tapped lightly, as Margaret had done a few minutes before.

“Come in,” replied Mr. Craig impatiently, and Lucy stepped into the room and closed the door behind her.





CHAPTER XVIII.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

“Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep ;
And in his simple show he harbours treason.
The fox barks not, when he would steal the lamb.”



R. JOEL CRAIG had been bending over his papers with compressed lips and contracted brows, but the whole expression of his face changed and brightened as his eyes fell on Lucy's unexpected figure. He sprang towards her, took both her hands in his, and a light of the old days beamed in his eyes as he said—

“I knew you would come back to me at last. I have watched and waited day by day to see you come in at that door, as you have come in now. We have both been foolish, but *I* was most to blame, for I hurt your pride, and then, bungler as I am, went the wrong way to heal it ; but you have done your share of evil too.”

“I !” exclaimed Lucy—“what have I done?—what accusation can you bring against me ?”

“You have behaved vary hardly and cruelly to me. Sometimes I have felt that I could never forgive you.”

Lucy was taken aback, and completely thrown off her guard by this reception. He looked and spoke so like the Joel Craig who had so often lingered with her beneath the apple-trees in her father's orchard. It was not so much the words that he spoke, as his look, his tones, his manner, which took her senses by storm, and melted the ice that

wrath and indignation had heaped round her heart, letting the warmth of the old love creep out, thrill through her veins, and light up her face with the rich glow that had faded from it since the night that had divided them. The tender reproach his last few words conveyed shook her confidence in herself, and made her feel as though she had really behaved ill, as she had sometimes tried to persuade herself she had. She had entered the room with one settled purpose—prepared to face his anger, to give him blow for blow in any wordy war, to parry his attack, and attack him in return with the moral cudgel she carried at the tip of her tongue. For the whole long night she had lain in her bed and arranged this interview—all she would say; and he would reply in return, as though he were a puppet, and she could pull the string, and make him speak to order. She had walked up and down her room in a dignified, stately way, and rehearsed her part; she had flashed her eye upon him and said,—

“You have tempted me to deceive my best friends, but I will not stand by and see you wrong them. Give up your game of speculation as far as Mr. Brookland is concerned, and leave this house, or I will tell them all I know of you, and all the world suspects.”

All this she had said in imagination, and a great deal more in great pride and loftiness of spirit. Where was it now? Her ready wit deserted her. She had not a word at her command. Her heart softened towards him when he accused himself so repentantly of having hurt her pride. She felt his reproach, that she had behaved “hardly and cruelly to him;” and when he spoke of forgiveness, she tried hard to hold her own.

“Forgiveness!” she repeated—“if there is anything to forgive, it is more on my side than yours.”

“I am quite content it should be so,” he answered, “though indeed, Lucy, you gave the cue. I ruled my conduct by yours. You avoided me, and I could not force myself upon you. I have my pride as well as you have yours. In public you were cold and satirical by turns. I did not choose to let the world see how you wounded me. I have borne your stings and taunts in silence often. Sometimes I was goaded to retaliate, but I think—I hope

I never said a word to wound you ; if I have, forgive me !”

He spoke earnestly. The cold, mocking spirit died out of his eyes. As they looked down upon her, they were soft and tender as of old. He took the position of one injured and ill-used, and in the excitement of the moment she believed in him once more, and lost faith in herself.

“You did not seem to care for my coldness or for me,” she murmured ; “I did not know, I never thought that you were unhappy as well as I.”

“And angry and hurt,” he answered. “A man does not like to be mistrusted, Lucy, especially by those he loves ; and you have mistrusted me—nay, more, you have suspected me, and not only allowed the poison to corrupt your own mind, but you were prepared to distil it into the ears of others. But I bore it, for I fancied you were labouring under the influence of—what do you think ? jealousy !”

“Jealousy !” Oh ! no, not that !” exclaimed Lucy, blushing to the brows. “The truth must come out, I—I fancied you were ashamed of me, and wished to break off old ties, and I was angry and heart-sick. The world seemed going wrong—I was blinded, and saw all things with jaundiced eyes. Often I was unmannerly and rude, for I was afraid you might think I was trying to win you back again. However wrong I might have been, it was you who first proposed that we should be strangers.”

“So you chose to interpret my words,” he answered ; “you seized and twisted them according to your own fancy, and unconsciously distorted my meaning ; but I am glad you have come back to me to set matters right before we part.”

His words brought back to Lucy’s mind all that she had in reality come back to do and say, for she had utterly forgotten it till now.

“No !” she exclaimed, “I did not come back to set matters right—they have come right, thank God ! without my trying ; and, Joel, I hope we may never misunderstand each other again ; but—” she hardly knew how to begin what she really wished to say, so took the shortest way and blurted it out, “I heard all your conversation last night,

and I—I want to be sure you are not misleading yourself or Mr. Brookland about this gas affair. I should not like anything to go wrong between you. I know how sanguine you are, Joel; but I would rather you did not lead Mr. Brookland into any uncertain speculations.”

“My dear Lucy,” he answered candidly, “a speculation must always be uncertain, as the name suggests; mine may be no more sure than another, though I believe it will be a glorious success! Mr. Brookland will put his gold into the concern, I my brains—the one is equivalent to the other. If he loses, I lose too.”

“But not so substantially,” rejoined Lucy.

“I should lose credit, *he* money; and in a mercantile country a man’s credit is of much more value than a few paltry thousands. But you women do not understand business, Lucy—your dear little souls were never made for speculating on the world’s rough ways. You may safely dabble in matrimonial stakes, but never go beyond that, or you fail miserably—you are sure to lose.”

“I am afraid we often play the losing game even in that!” exclaimed Lucy, gradually becoming more herself.

“Sometimes, when diamonds lead, but never when hearts are trumps,” he answered. “And that carries me back to the business in hand, Lucy. If I am successful, I can go down to your father with well-filled pockets ——”

“He would no more consent to receive you then than now,” said Lucy, quickly. “You do not know my father—he may be wrong, he may be prejudiced, but he is honourable and true to the core. He would not care how empty your hands were, if he believed your conscience was clean. And you know what he thinks, Joel. My father will never consent to see you until that old man unsays those dreadful words. I know they were spoken in rage and bitterness of spirit—*he* believes that they were true.”

“Well, I must trust to time,” he answered; “and you ——”

“Will trust to time also, and to you.” A soft blush crept over her face as she added, “Ah! Joel, I have been so wretched for the last fortnight—I fancied I had taught myself to hate you, and now ——”

Her silence as she lifted her eyes to his was more eloquent than any words could have been.

"We deceived each other, and then deceived ourselves. We were mad to think we could leave off caring for one another—for you do care for me, just a little, do you not?"

He put the question as though he knew full well how her heart would answer, whatever her tongue might do. He drew her towards him, and their lips met.

"I care for you so much, against my will, against my judgment, Joel, that if things went wrong between us, I think I should die."

They had been so occupied with each other, they were quite oblivious of the fact that some one had knocked twice at the door, and receiving no answer, peeped in. Then instead of retiring, as a discreet person would have done, entered noiselessly, saying,—

"Pray excuse me, I wanted Mr. Brookland. I had no idea of interrupting such a tender scene."

"Dear Mrs. Creamly," exclaimed Mr. Craig, who was quite equal to the occasion, "pray do not apologise—and please keep our secret. We are rehearsing for a charade."

"A charade!—humph! I must say you seem well up in your parts—as though you had rehearsed many times before."

"And so we have," he answered. "We mean to astonish the world by our brilliant performance."

"And you will certainly succeed," she answered. "I never saw art approach so nearly to nature. I am quite sorry I interrupted you, for I should like to have seen the end of this little charade. Pray go on—consider me in the light of an audience. I should like to sit in judgment on your little performance. You will neither of you be any the worse for a little friendly criticism upon your illustrations of art!"

"Do you think we should be any the better for it?" inquired Lucy, speaking for the first time, for Mrs. Creamly's unexpected appearance had cast her into some confusion.

"I do not know about you, my dear," replied Mrs. Creamly. "Art is a wide, comprehensive term. In one

branch of it I should say you were wonderfully perfect, considering your age."

"A dubious compliment, but very politely expressed. But then, Mrs. Creamly, you are always polite," said Lucy.

"I endeavour to be so, even to my enemies," she answered. "Sincerity of purpose, with politeness of speech, was instilled into my mind from childhood."

"Ah; but what a pity it is they cannot go together!" exclaimed Lucy. "People who are always polite must of necessity be sometimes insincere."

"Well," said Mr. Joel Craig, "sincerity sometimes means the impertinent interference, boldly expressed, of a candid friend. For my part I would rather be humbugged by politeness than insulted by sincerity."

"Ah! you speak like a man of the world, Mr. Craig. Without that outer coating of politeness which Miss Nutford calls insincerity we should degenerate into a nation of barbarians. Have you ever read 'The Palace of Truth?'"

"No," replied Lucy. "I suppose it was built in Fairyland?"

"Exactly. It was peopled by a party of dear friends and loving relatives who were constrained to speak the naked, ungarnished truth. The consequence was quarrels arose as they entered the gates; rigid sincerity was the monster that poisoned their existence; husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, were wrenched apart. Truly it may be said that 'Love lay bleeding.' Everybody was miserable till they emerged into the outer world again, where custom had erected breastworks of politeness or good breeding to protect society from attacks of violent sincerity."

Lucy was wishing Mrs. Creamly anywhere but there in Mr. Brookland's library. Time was passing. Within another hour Mr. Craig would be leaving Brooklands, and there were so many trifling things she wished to say and to ask him before they parted. Then she began to wonder if Mrs. Creamly would think it necessary to report this scene to Margaret; if so, what should she say, how should she act, what explanation could she give for being found in Mr. Craig's company. She knew well enough that the "charade" would not be satisfying to Margaret. Indeed

Lucy herself would not have stooped to such a subterfuge. She could be silent, and let things go their way ; but she could not tell Margaret Brookland a circumstantial lie. While she was cogitating thus, Mr. Craig was amusing Mrs. Creamly—paying her a succession of elaborate compliments, filling her greedy ears with such mental food as silly women find most easy of digestion. Presently, Mrs. Creamly discovered that she could not wait for Mr. Brookland. On hearing that he and Margaret had gone to the lake, she decided she would go out and meet them. Mr. Craig followed her to the door, saying,—

“You must not betray us. If you do not keep our secret, you will spoil all.” Then he lowered his voice, and said some few words that Lucy could not hear. Mrs. Creamly smiled, shook her head, and answered,—

“I promise to be discreet. You may give me credit for discretion, at least.”

“I would give you credit for every virtue under the sun, or even more,” he said, raising her hand gallantly to his lips, as she passed out.

“Faugh, Joel !” exclaimed Lucy, half angrily, “how can you be so absurdly polite to that woman ?”

“My dear Lucy, it is quite enough for her to be your enemy ; it would never do for her to be mine too,” he answered.

“That is true,” replied Lucy thoughtfully ; “but you do not know the nature of such a woman ; she promised to be ‘discreet’ (and by-the-bye, there was something insulting in the way she said the word), but I know she will be dropping little words and inuendoes into Margaret’s ears, making things appear worse than they really are. Like the witches in Macbeth, she will keep the word of promise to the ear, and break it to the hope.” She paused a second, and then, looking entreatingly in his face, added, “Joel, I wish you would let me tell Margaret all—you do not know what friends we are, it hurts me to hide anything from her. Besides, if she knew all, I think she would be more prepossessed in your favour.”

Mr. Craig turned upon her sharply, exclaiming,—

“Do you mean to say that she is set against me now ?”

Lucy remembered that, during their conversation the last

night, she had herself turned the full glare of Margaret's suspicions upon him. A guilty feeling crept over her; she felt as though she had pointed an instrument of destruction at the breast of the man she loved; her eyes fell beneath his scrutinising gaze, and she answered with some hesitation,—

"Against you! Oh! no, no, I did not mean that exactly; only if she knew we both cared for each other, she might feel more interested in us. See! what a forward girl I am getting!" she added, with a shy upward glance in his face. "I take it for granted that you do care a little for me, and I suppose it is no use denying that I do care a great deal for you."

"No! no use at all," he said, pressing her hand with rather an absent air, which, however, passed unnoticed. "But, Lucy dear, no more talk of confidences between you and Miss Brookland, so far as I am concerned. I know it would lead to evil results. Mr. Brookland was discussing morality; and he gave me your father's version of that cursed affair, and of course *I*, as a nameless individual, was painted tolerably black, and came in for a good share of abuse. Of course I could have taken the bull by the horns, have turned round with dramatic effect, saying, 'I am the man,' and then have given *my* version of the affair; but I forbore, lest I might injure you or yours."

"But I do not so much care to speak to Mr. Brookland," urged Lucy, "only to Margaret. I know she would keep my secret."

"You would ask her to keep that which is too heavy for your own keeping," he said; "at the same time, you would tempt your friend to deceive her father."

Lucy flushed to the brows as she answered,—

"You upbraid me for that! And yet you tempt me to deceive mine!"

"Ah; that is quite a different matter. The goose and gander sauce does not suit all moral digestions. That which has a healing quality in one case, is an irritant in another. But come, we have not long to be together; do not let us waste time in quibbling. You will soon be relieved of all difficulty concerning me, as I leave Brooklands within an hour."

“But you will return soon?”

“It is quite uncertain when, or indeed whether I shall return at all. My movements depend entirely on Mr. Brookland; he is full of crochets, and in some things a difficult man to manage. If we two could correspond, I might keep you informed of my movements, and you, me of yours. But I suppose you could not be tempted to so great a disobedience.”

“Do not ask me,” she said—“you do not know how great the temptation is; but I must not yield to it. I have gone far enough already, too far perhaps; for when a deception is once begun, one hardly knows where it will lead to, or how it will end. I almost wish I had found some pretext for leaving Brooklands when you first arrived; but it is too late to think of that now, and though I shall miss the sight of your face and the sound of your voice, I shall be glad when you are gone!”

“You will soon have cause for gladness, then,” he answered. “There is the luncheon bell, and—oh! there are Mr. and Miss Brookland,” he added, glancing across the park—“and, by Jove! they are bringing that woman back to luncheon. Lucy, take my advice—try and make a friend of Mrs. Creamly.”

After spending a few moments in tender leavetaking and loving last words, they went down to luncheon—Lucy looking, perhaps, a little happier and brighter than she had looked for some time past.

The luncheon hour passed pleasantly enough. Mrs. Creamly entertained them with anecdotes of her early days, and cheered Mr. Brookland by promising to pay a visit to “dear Margaret” every day during his absence.

In due time they all departed, and Margaret and Lucy were left alone. They spent the rest of the day in rowing on the lake or sauntering beneath the dark pine-trees, watching the sunlight dancing at their feet, listening to the murmur of the wind among the leaves, and talking together in the gay girlish fashion which had deserted them in their intercourse of late. Indeed, the hours passed so quickly that, when the dressing-bell rang, they were wandering a quarter of a mile from home, and on hearing its summons they sauntered leisurely towards the house, not hurrying

themselves in the least. If they were a little late, it would not signify; there was no one to scold them, no company to be kept waiting.

The two bright girls, in a merry mood, sat down to their *tête-à-tête* dinner in the large dining-room. It was the first time they had sat down to any meal without Mr. Brookland; and, in spite of their good spirits, it did seem a little solitary and dull to be sitting there by themselves, the servants with grave faces and silent footsteps gliding about, watchful and observant, hovering round them with noiseless monotony.

They missed the kind father, courteous host, and the vivacity of the departed guest. They were compelled to put a curb on their speech, a restraint upon their looks and laughter, before those domestic ministers of our social life, who, however necessary they may be, certainly mar the pleasures of the table. We cannot bring ourselves to look on them as mere animated machines, though they play their part well. They seem deaf, blind, dumb, but we know they have eyes and ears, ay, and tongues too, like ourselves; and as soon as the door is closed, and we are out of hearing, they all come into action, and we are discussed with as much severity as we might discuss one another, and perhaps with equal justice.

The two girls, who were in a confidential mood, felt the restraint, and hurried through dinner in an incredibly short space of time; then they went up into Margaret's "cosy nook," where they could nestle together and chat at their ease without fear of interruption.

Lucy, however, was restless; and although they were both tired with their long ramble, she coaxed Margaret to go out again "just for half-an-hour," while the twilight lasted. Accordingly they wended their way slowly round by the fish-ponds, and home through the gloomy pine-wood, which seemed doubly gloomy as the night was fast closing in. They talked in more subdued tones now, as though their spirits were touched with the sweet solemnity of the hour.

"I so love this dreamy twilight!" exclaimed Lucy; "such mysterious ghostly shadows seem to be falling over and hovering round us. How do we know what strange

things may happen between this and morning, under cover of the darkness? Do you believe in spirits, Margaret?"

"I do not know," she answered; "I can neither believe nor disbelieve in things I do not understand."

"And yet you—indeed, we all believe in a great many things that we do not in the least understand."

"I understand everything *I* believe in," said Margaret.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Lucy. "You believe in the grand scheme of Christianity, so do I, and yet we neither of us can understand it."

"Ay, but that is quite a different thing. That is a matter of faith. I have never tried to understand it, and I do not think it was ever intended to be understood. I think it is enough for us to believe humbly and faithfully what the Scriptures teach us, and that is exactly what I do."

"And so do I," replied Lucy, "and, unfortunately, I am inclined to believe a great deal more than the Scripture teaches. You know we are very superstitious down about my home in Cornwall. My stepmother believes that the spirits of the sleeping and the dead wander through the dark night air, and hold communion together; that when the day dawns, the dead go to their rest, and the spirit of the sleeper re-enters the flesh and awakes to life. You know, Margaret, we often dream of the dead, but she thinks we are really with them, or they with us, though our mortal sight and sense, being weakened and bound in earthly bondage, bring back but a faint, broken impression of the spirit-world. I often wonder if it is true. Even here, wandering beneath these grand old trees, I could fancy that what we call the breeze is really some of these wandering spirits fanning our cheeks with their bright wings, or bringing kisses from those we have loved and lost. Do you ever think such things as these?"

"No, never," replied Margaret; "and yet I am as fond of wandering in this soft mysterious gloaming as you are—but it affects me differently. I like to hear the sighing sound of the wind among these waving branches. I think it is so much more sweet and solemn than church music. I do not know how it is, but in church my mind always seems disturbed; there is such a rustling of silks, clanging of doors, and shuffling of feet. Then somebody goes to sleep

and snores—somebody else sings out of tune ; there is a low bass going on at one side, a drawling tenor with a nasal twang on another ! If I had my will, I would have the musical part of the service cut out, except, of course, when there is a good choir ; then I would forbid the congregation to join in—they unite together in such a horrible howl ! ”

“ Well,” said Lucy, “ I think there is something pleasant, even in the discordant howl, if it comes from the heart.”

“ But it never does come from the heart,” rejoined Margaret. “ I do not believe that anyone who really felt music could sing out of tune, especially through the nose. I am an enthusiastic lover of sacred music, Lucy. I have my field of imagination, and you have yours, but I could sit here for hours, shut my eyes, and listen to the music the wind is making among the trees above my head. I could almost fancy that dear old blind Milton was playing his organ in heaven, and the sound of it was rolling faintly on our ears now.”

Margaret could not help noticing that Lucy seemed in a much happier frame of mind than she had done for some weeks past ; and before they went to bed that night she told her so, and asked her what was the cause of the change.

“ Cause ! ” repeated Lucy. “ Do you not think one may be happy without any cause at all ? One has not always a reason for being merry, nor yet for being sad.”

“ There must be a reason somewhere, if we only search far enough to find it,” persisted Margaret. “ And this morning, Lucy, your face wore a very doleful expression. You looked perfectly miserable.”

“ What signifies what I did this morning ? it is evening now,” replied Lucy, somewhat impatiently. “ You surely would not expect me to wear the same face all day long, and every day, too ! ”

“ Ah ! well, I do not want to pry into your secrets ; but I do believe you are glad Mr. Craig has gone away. I am sure, to say the least, he admires you very much ; and you—indeed, we both have behaved abominably to him. Papa has been talking to me about him, and I mean to behave better in future, and you too must try.”

“ I will,” replied Lucy.

"I am not so prejudiced against him as you are," resumed Margaret; "and I mean to try and like him a little. Indeed, if he makes himself *very* agreeable, I may end by liking him a great deal—perhaps too well, who knows?"

"Not too well!" exclaimed Lucy, impulsively, catching her hand. "Oh! Margaret, God forbid you should like Joel Craig too well!"

"Why, Lucy, anyone would think you either hated or loved the man!"





CHAPTER XIX.

PAUL WYNTER'S MYSTERY.

“Although
The air of Paradise did fan the house,
And angels offic'd all, I will begone.”



HE left Paul Wynter ill in his lodgings in Pentonville. From the time his consciousness returned, he began to improve rapidly. In the course of a few days, though still weak and feeble, he was able to be up and about his rooms; and though he occupied himself with his books and chemical experiments, yet he was anxious to resume his professional labours out of doors.

“To-morrow,” he said, looking out into the street; “if it be as fine as it is to-day, I shall go with Taylor on his first round, and see how I can get on.”

He sat down to his books, and was soon lost in their contents. Presently little Margaret came in, bringing him his medical journal. He had always a pleasant smile or kind word for his little nurse, as he called her. She was so quiet and unobtrusive, and went about her small duties in such a staid, womanly way, that he liked to have her about him. She was a perfect contrast to Mrs. Lloyd, who used to tumble his books about, and throw his papers into merciless confusion; but since Margaret had taken charge of his room everything was different. He always found whatever he wanted close to his hand, as though placed there by some magical interference. His books were always

nicely dusted, his clothes brushed and arranged neatly, ready for his use. He knew that Margaret was the good fairy to whom he was indebted for those small nothings that added so greatly to his comfort. He looked with an approving smile upon her now, as he took the cup and paper from her and said—

“I have been wondering if my good little nurse was going to neglect me, now that I am well again?”

“I can’t do anything for you now,” she answered regretfully. “Sometimes I almost wish you was ill again—I should never go down-stairs then.”

“How? Mrs. Lloyd is very kind to you, is she not?”

“I don’t know—I suppose she is kind enough in her way—she don’t beat me; but it’s the children I hate. I don’t like children, even when they’re good ‘uns, and these are awful bad. They play at wild beasts, and they’re like ‘em, they scratch and bite so; and when I don’t like it, they say I’m ungrateful and ill-tempered. I wish you would go away from this place and take me with you,” she added, as though struck by a bright idea.

“I have no idea of going away,” he said; “and even if I were to leave, I could not take you with me.”

“Then do you mean me to stay here for ever?” she exclaimed, with symptoms of alarm. “Am I never to go anywhere—never to learn anything—never to see anybody but Mrs. Lloyd and the lodgers? I won’t stay!—I’d rather go and drown myself in the canal!”

“I thought you were a good, sensible little girl, Margaret,” he said gravely; “but I find you are but a foolish—I was going to say wicked—child to talk in such a way as this. Mrs. Lloyd, I know, is rough in her ways, but she means to be kind to you, and the intention deserves some gratitude. You do not know how much pain you give me. When your poor grandfather died, I thought you were alone in the world, and I did the best I could for you. If you are discontented and unhappy here, what is to become of you? I am afraid you give way to temper, child; you must curb that, if you wish the world to go well with you.”

Margaret’s heart swelled beneath his tone of grave rebuke. She drooped her head, and seemed covered with shame and confusion. He was generally so kind and indulgent, that

his unusual gravity chilled her through. With something between a sob of anger and wail of repentance, she answered—

“I will never complain again—never; if they bite and scratch me to pieces, I’ll never say a word.” Then with a sudden burst she added, “Nobody cares for me, now grandfather’s gone!” and the tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

In those few words Paul Wynter heard the cry of a human soul starving for human sympathy and love. He did not think a young spirit could have hungered so deeply and so soon. She was as much alone in the world as himself; but perhaps with her undeveloped mind she found it harder to bear. The love of the infirm old soldier had sufficed to fill her life; now that he was dead, her life was empty. He did not let her see how much he understood and sympathised with her; he only said,—

“I care for you very much, and so long as you are a good girl, I hope to be your friend. If I were a rich man, Margaret, I would send you to school, and try to make life easy and pleasant for you; but I am not rich—I am very poor; so you must try and please Mrs. Lloyd, and be good-tempered with the children. If you bring them to me this afternoon, I will teach them a better game than ‘wild beast,’ and one in which you will not be likely to disagree.”

Margaret left him with a promise of amendment. It was also arranged that he should be the umpire in any future battle with the juvenile party below stairs. Paul Wynter sat for some time turning over the leaves of the *Medical Journal*, glancing over it without reading a page, for he was thinking of other things. Suddenly his eye was attracted by a particular paragraph. His face flushed crimson, he read it eagerly to the end, then threw down the paper with a brief exclamation,

“At last! at last!”

The paragraph alluded to ran thus :—

“WANTED a Surgeon—a general practitioner—at the House of Detention, Pentonville. Apply there this day between the hours of two and four.”

He glanced hurriedly at his watch—it was half-past

eleven; he would have plenty of time to present himself as candidate for the situation advertised before the time appointed. A nervous quiver seemed to run through his whole frame, and every nerve was tremulous with agitation as he hastened his preparations to start immediately. He was almost ready, when there was a violent pull at the surgery bell; and on opening the door his hand was firmly grasped, and he stood face to face with Dr. Chapman, who greeted him with his usual hearty warmth.

"Why, Paul, my dear fellow, I thought I should never find you! This place is like a rabbit-warren! I've been in at one hole and out at another, till I almost gave up the chase in despair. I can't congratulate you on the choice of a neighbourhood—eh, Wynter? You found it worse than you expected. You thought I was an old raven, I know."

"Indeed, I have nothing to complain of," began Paul.

"You're thankful for small mercies, then, eh? But what is the matter? My dear fellow, you have been ill! How pale you look; and wretchedly thin, too! Why have you not sent for me?"

"Oh! I am all right now ——"

"I see how it is," said Dr. Chapman, striding through the room and peering out at the back window, which gave upon a cluster of grimy, tumble-down alleys—"tainted atmosphere, bad drainage—faugh! the old story. But we'll soon have you out of this. I told you I should not forget you. You are a lucky dog!—a confoundedly lucky dog!"

"Am I?" said Paul, smiling. "I have not met my luck face to face yet."

"You are standing face to face with your good luck now. Look at me!" exclaimed Dr. Chapman, triumphantly, "and read that." As he spoke he gave him a closely-written letter, and before he had got through the first half-dozen lines, snatched it away again, adding, "It is a nasty cramped hand—I do not suppose you can read it; and I can tell you all about it." His excitement gave way to a business-like manner as he proceeded—"Fact is, my dear Wynter, I could not bear to think of your burying your talents in such a place as this, and while I was casting about my wits to see what I could do for you, my friend Dr. Brownlow turned up. He is an old man, and no longer

able to keep up his practice, which is an extensive and fashionable one at Bath. He has requested me to recommend him a highly qualified, clever, intelligent man, who would be inclined to join him in partnership. I thought of you, and have been negotiating the matter for the last ten days. Of course there has been a fight about the £ s. d., but at last I have persuaded him that brains are better than money. I have had a hard fight, though, but I have won. I have arranged my own affairs, so that we can go down to Bath by the first train to-morrow. You have nothing to do but to make your personal arrangements, and sign and seal, and your fortune is made. I congratulate you, my dear boy! Not one man in a thousand cuts such a slice of luck!"

Paul Wynter was quite overcome by the doctor's fruitful kindness.

"My dear doctor! My best, my only friend," he said, wringing his hand with fervent gratitude. "I hardly know how to find words to thank you, but I—I am afraid I cannot avail myself of your goodness. Read that."

He handed the *Medical Journal* to Dr. Chapman, and pointed to the advertisement already quoted. He read it through, and then gave it back with a bewildered air.

"I do not quite understand you," he said. "Do you mean to say you have taken that? Pooh! that does not matter—you can easily give it up."

"I have not got it yet," replied Paul Wynter; "but I am now going to offer myself as a candidate. If I should fail—but I feel I shall not fail, I have set my heart upon it."

"And you reject Dr. Brownlow's magnificent offer?" exclaimed Dr. Chapman, looking at him in amazement.

"I am very sorry," answered Paul, grieved at the ungracious part he had got to play, for to reject the kindness of an anxious friend is always painful. "I feel your kindness more than I can express; but I have no alternative, I must decline it."

"Paul Wynter, you are mad!" said Dr. Chapman emphatically. "You reject an honourable position, where your present and future welfare is thoroughly assured! And for what?—the chance of obtaining such a beggarly post as this." He tapped the paper contemptuously.

"Why, my dear fellow, you cannot know what you are doing! It is the act of a brainless idiot! Most men have a shadow of reason for any of their out-of-the-way doings; but you can have none for such an act of folly as this."

"None that I can give," he answered—"no explanation that I could offer to you. I know that all the world would say I am mad to run counter to my own interest, as I seem to be running now; nevertheless, my course is marked out. Strange as it may seem to you," he added, with a melancholy smile, "but, if I am so fortunate as to obtain this post, as I feel certain I shall, the hour that I enter those prison gates as surgeon to the jail will be the happiest I have known for many a day."

"My dear Wynter, I think ——"

"Think anything except that I am ungrateful," exclaimed Paul affectionately. "I have one great failing, Doctor, that you have not yet found out—I am a *coward*. If I were a brave man, and could explain to you the motive that guides my actions, you would say I had done well."

"If you are not ashamed of your motive," said the doctor testily, "why do you make such a mystery about it? I tell you what, if you expect to find any pleasant exciting cases, or thoroughly good complicated diseases, you will be greatly mistaken. Criminals are a wonderfully healthy race, and thrive especially well on prison fare. It is a dreary life, Wynter. As for accidents, you do not often get a fillip that way; they are too well looked after. They cannot even commit suicide comfortably. I was surgeon for two years at Millbank Penitentiary, and I know what it is. You will have to exercise your talents chiefly against deception and hypocrisy. Why, even I was taken in! One great hulking fellow, six feet high, used to ring me up in the middle of the night, and give me no rest all day. He was racked with internal agony, and had a tongue the colour of old parchment. He led me a fine dance. I attacked his liver with a cannonade of pills and a hogshead of draughts that did no good; and I may say I went regularly through his internals, attacking them one after the other. One lucky day, as I examined his tongue, my eye fell on the end of his nose. The rascal, to get up the appearance of sickness,

used to lick the composition from the walls of his cell. For once he had licked too vigorously, and painted the end of his nose as well as his tongue."

"Why?" inquired Paul.

"Why?" repeated the doctor, "to get off his sentence of labour, and to be put on the sick-list, that he might be better fed, and enjoy an agreeable retirement."

"He deserved it for his ingenuity," said Paul.

"Well, that is the sort of thing you will have to encounter if you persist in your determination. Come, think again—so long as you live you will never have such an opportunity as I offer now. It is marvellous how any sane man can hesitate for a moment. Come, I will give you till to-morrow, I will not take your answer now."

"You must, indeed, my dear, kind friend, you must," replied Paul decidedly; "believe me, I am deeply sensible of my obligations to you, though I know I must seem thankless, and ——"

"Thankless! not at all," interrupted the doctor gruffly, "it is nothing to me. I should gain nothing by your acceptance, and lose nothing by your refusal—I am only sorry you are so blind to your own interests, that is all. If you were to give me your reasons, I'll warrant I would knock them over like nine-pins; I was never beaten at argument yet. I must say, Wynter, I am disappointed in you—you do not treat me like a friend."

"I mean to treat you like a friend now," said Paul, anxious to make an end of the subject, "for I am going to give you as my reference, and ask you to sign my certificates."

"I will be hanged if I will!" replied Dr. Chapman heartily; "I would as soon sign a certificate to send you to a lunatic asylum."

He grew very angry when he found he was unable to move Paul Wynter's determination. He was especially annoyed to find that he was actuated by some secret motive which he scrupulously concealed from his best friend. The doctor did not like to be shut out from Paul Wynter's confidence. He was not used to be baffled, and worked himself up into a passion, and said many things that had better have been left unsaid. At last, with a fiery "good-morning,"

he bounced out of the room, and slammed the door behind him, to the imminent risk of the bright blue and crimson bottles which were the admiration of the small fry of the neighbourhood.

Paul Wynter was grieved at Dr. Chapman's departure in anger, and almost wished he had trusted him; it is so hard to find, so easy to lose a friend, and this was his only one. He stood for a few moments reflecting silently, and staring vacantly into his fire. Suddenly he remembered the time was flying, and on consulting his watch, he found that he should hardly have time to reach the prison by the hour appointed. He hastily put on his hat, and started off at a brisk pace, though with a heavier heart than when the advertisement first caught his eye. He had scarcely turned the corner of the street, when some one touched him on the shoulder, and, on turning round, he beheld Dr. Chapman beside him.

"I am a hasty old fool, and an ungenerous monster, Paul, and I was hurrying back to tell you so. I have no right to pry into your concerns, poor fellow, and you have a right to be happy in your own way. I will do anything I can for you in this matter, and as I flatter myself I have a little influence in the right quarter, you may make sure of the place."

The influence of Dr. Chapman did a great deal for Paul Wynter. There were many other candidates for the situation; but he was the fortunate one, and he esteemed himself lucky indeed. The remuneration was small, but he was exempted from a residence within the prison walls, though it was stipulated that he should live near the spot. This was satisfactory to him, so far that his practice need not be entirely confined to the prisoners, and there was no necessity for him to leave his present lodgings.

The first day he entered upon his new duties, he glanced nervously among the throng of prisoners as he passed through the stone-yard—as though he dreaded to see some familiar face among them. He was informed that, at the present time, there were not many sick who required his attention—indeed, that the prison was rarely so free from disease.

"There was, however, one of the prisoners, an old man,

whom he was requested to examine, and report if he was really ill, or only skulking.

"He is not one of our regular roughs, but a sort of swell gentleman—and they are always troublesome."

A close observer might have seen a slight shiver pass over Paul's frame as he entered the prisoner's cell. The door closed upon him, and he found himself alone with his patient. He stretched out his hand, and leaned against the wall for support, drawing a long breath as though the air oppressed him. Indeed, for a second he felt giddy and faint, as if in need of help himself; but he gathered his energies together, and advanced to the bed, whereon the patient lay with his face turned to the wall, and one hand lying listlessly on the coarse rug that covered him. Paul Wynter took out his watch, and laid his fingers on the old man's pulse in a cool professional way.

"I am not ill, doctor," said the prisoner, in a weak voice, without turning his head; "I am only tired—tired of living. You cannot do me any good—I am sorry they troubled you."

But the doctor was on his knees by the bed-side, with his lips glued to the old man's hand, while a scalding tear, like a drop of molten lead, fell on it. The prisoner snatched away the hand as though it had been stung, and rose right up in the bed, and, for a second, stared at Paul Wynter in mute amazement. At first he seemed to doubt the evidence of his own eyes, but, on fully recognising the face, he almost screamed out,—

"You here! Oh! go away—go away—why could not you let me die in peace? I know you are cursing me in your heart; but I cannot bear to hear it from your lips; I cannot bear it—have mercy on me! I have suffered enough—I have suffered enough."

"God knows you have," replied Paul, and his tears of compassion rained upon the old man's hand.

"Then why did you come here?" he answered. "You are never out of my thoughts, and I pray for you day and night, but the sight of you kills me. I never thought to see your face in this world again! My poor boy, my poor ruined boy! I thought you had forgotten me."

Here the old man broke down. The last few words

came forth broken, amid a storm of sobs. He threw his arms around Paul Wynter's neck, and, like the patriarch of old, wept aloud.

"Hush, father! hush!" exclaimed Paul, soothingly, "or we shall be overheard. You will ruin everything, and I have had so much trouble to get here. Are you listening, father? Do you hear me? I have never forgotten you—never! I have longed to be with you, and lighten your trouble a little if I could, and now, after long watching and waiting, I am here. I hope I shall see you often, perhaps every day. I am surgeon to the prison."

A flush of joy illumined the old man's face as he raised his head and looked upon his son. In those last few words he recognised a world of heroic sacrifice. He did not speak for a moment; the rush of thought and feeling was too great for words. At last he said,—

"Can you bear it?—are you sure that you can bear it? I know I am a selfish monster to accept such a sacrifice at your hands. I have robbed you of your good name, fame, station, wealth; darkened your prospects, blighted every hope of your life! I have taken everything from you but your good heart and your noble spirit, Paul. These God keeps—my sin cannot touch them. Now I am taking your liberty from you, your chance of advancement in the world, Paul; for you might do well. With your talents you might, at least, make for yourself an honourable position in the world. Here in this prison—but it will not be for long, Paul. O God! O God! age and sorrow makes us selfish—I cannot bid you go your way and leave me."

"This is my way," replied Paul Wynter, "and I mean to keep it. Believe me, my dear father, it will be a comfort to me to feel that I can give a little brightness to your life."

"Oh! you will brighten it much," said the old man, clinging to him. "It has been a horrible time here, seeing none but strange harsh faces. Until I came to this place, I never knew what a blessing a friendly face could be. And I—I am a stranger even to the sound of my own name. I am no longer counted as a human being, only a number—I am 32. Oh! it is very hard, Paul; I never thought a man could go through these things and live. But I have deserved it all—I have deserved it all. If I suffered *alone*, I

would not mind, but the thought of you is breaking my heart."

"My dear father, do not reproach yourself so. If we can only battle through the next few years, we do not know what the future may have in store for us."

"No matter," the prisoner said, despondingly, "nothing can ever blot out the past."

"But many things may brighten the future. Remember, I am young, and can work."

"I am old," moaned the old man, "and I wish I could die. But it would be no use now—all the evil is done. I hear nothing, I know nothing that goes on outside these walls. This is a living death here, Paul; I might as well, ay, better, be buried in a grave. What does the world say?—has it done talking of me and my ill-doing?"

"The world," repeated Paul—"the world has forgotten you, father, or at least it gives no sign that you are remembered. It has had other men's sins and sorrows to deal with since then."

"And you have not suffered, Paul?" And he peered curiously in his son's face. "At least, I know you have suffered, but I mean not so very much. How does the world treat you, my boy? Do they punish you for my sin?"

"I have nothing to complain of," he answered. "The world and I have little to say to each other. I went abroad after—after it was all over. I felt I wanted change."

"So do I," said the poor prisoner, querulously, "and the only change I get is from this cell to the prison yard. I do not think I was well treated. They may call it justice, but I think it is hard for a long honourable life to be damned for one wrong act—the mere stroke of a pen."

Paul Wynter could say nothing to hurt his father, he would not wound the spirit that was already wounded enough, but he thought of the misery and ruin of thousands that had been wrought by "one wrong act," by one "single stroke of a pen," which has cast women and children homeless upon the world, making men exiles, or driving them to madness, perhaps to death. But he only said,—

"Do not brood over these things, father; what is done

cannot be undone. God's ways are not our ways ; he may work out some noble purpose even with such instruments as ourselves."

He tried to wile his father's thoughts away from the unfortunate past, but they would not be won. His lips had been so long closed upon the subject that was ever in his mind, that he seemed inclined to dwell upon it now. He would speak of nothing else. He tried to find some justification in his son's eyes. While he upbraided himself bitterly one moment, the next he brought some extenuating circumstances to bear upon his case, and cast the blame full wide of the mark. Paul Wynter let him talk on uninterruptedly, listening reverently to all he said ; for beneath the flimsy covering of worldly wandering complaints, he saw the writhing spirit of a man self-condemned, yet pleading piteously for a merciful verdict in the sight of the man he had greatly injured. Paul Wynter talked to him in consolatory terms, calculated to soothe his irritated feelings and reconcile him to himself. After a momentary pause in the conversation, the old man peered anxiously into his son's eyes, and lowering his voice almost to a whisper, said,—

"Have you seen him, Paul? Ah! it was cruel; *he* was the last person in the world who ought to have appeared against me!"

Paul's face darkened. There was no need to mention names ; he knew well enough to whom the pronoun "*him*" referred.

"No, never since that day," he answered.

"And I pray to God you may never meet again, Paul—never," said the old man, fervently.

"I shall never seek a meeting, father—of that you may rest assured ; but if ever we do meet again, it will be an evil moment for one of us."

"Ay, but, Paul," urged the poor prisoner, anxiously, "if by any chance you two should ever be thrown together, you must promise me one thing—that you will never raise your hand against him."

Paul Wynter lifted up his small, woman-like hand, and smiled at the idea of his raising that against a strong, powerful man.

"Let him go his way," continued the father, "and you go yours ; but let your paths be different—wide, wide apart. Never let them cross, if you can avoid it, for he hates you, Paul—he hates us both, and hatred in his hands will be a fearful instrument. It has driven me here."

"The hatred of no man can work against us without God's will and a portion of our own folly," replied Paul. "We must give some handle even for the malice of our enemies."

"There is one thing I wish to say to you, my boy, and I want you to believe me—to receive my words as you would those that fall from the lips of a dying man."

He spoke without excitement now, and with somewhat of the earnestness of old times. With absorbing interest Paul Wynter listened.

"I admit I am guilty to the fullest extent of the crime I am charged with, inasmuch as I used the money, well knowing it to be, under my sanction, fraudulently obtained. I signed my own name, but not that of my co-trustee. I am not an expert at these things—I could not have done it—that was his work. He first put the thought into my mind ; he planned the whole scheme, though I only—I alone benefited by it. I would never have said a word to criminate him, but when I saw him stand in the witness-box and give evidence against me, it was too much—I raved out. No one believed me—I never expected that they would—but it was true."

Paul Wynter was silent. He could not say he believed his father's solemn assertion (he thought it was a delusion), and he would not say he doubted it. His silence irritated the old man, who added, angrily —

"I believe you too think I am lying, and that my brain is wandering."

"I hardly know what to think," said Paul, evasively. "The most inhuman monster has at least some motive for his crime—some object to gain by committing it ; but *he*—you were his best friend—you trusted him, and I loved him, he carried me in his arms when I was a helpless puny child—what motive could he have—what object to gain by our ruin ?"

"He hates us, Paul ; he always hated us with a bitter,

concealed hatred, through all these years of seeming faithful, friendly service. I know it now."

"But why, father?—he had no cause."

"Ay, that is how it is. Perhaps he had cause, God knows!" said the old man, and there was a tinge of remorse in his tone. "Oh! Paul, my dear son, they say our sins bear bitter fruit, but no man's sin has borne such bitter fruit as mine." He laid his head upon his hands, and was silent for a moment. Then he looked up and said—"I will tell you exactly how it was. You know how these heavy failures swept away my capital. I wanted thirty thousand pounds to work those mines. I talked over my plans with *him*. I could not carry them on for want of means. He suggested I might safely use the money I held in trust for Blanche Eversleigh. I was startled at first, but the idea, having once entered my mind, filled it; I could think of nothing else. At first it seemed a fearful thing to do; but as I became more familiar with the thought it seemed a natural, then, by degrees, a wise thing to do. 'I shall only want it for a few months,' I argued. Using that as a lever, I may recover all that I have lost, and I shall be able to replace it with interest long before Blanche has need of it.' Again we talked the matter over. It seemed an easy thing to manage. I, of course, could sign my own name to all the necessary documents, but my co-trustee, George Haviland, must sign them too!—there was the difficulty. I had been in the habit of receiving letters from George Haviland, and *he* was as familiar with the handwriting as I was myself. One morning he brought me a sheet of paper covered with fac-similes of George Haviland's signature. He knew my great desire to obtain the money, and had sat up the whole night, he said, endeavouring to imitate George Haviland's writing, and that which he now produced was the result. I need not go on, Paul. I think the devil possessed me. I got the money, and within ten days Blanche's lawyer, in consequence of having received an anonymous letter, came down to make inquiries about the trust-money. All was discovered. When *he* stood in the witness-box, and with so much seeming reluctance gave his testimony on oath that he had often seen me scribbling George Haviland's name on she ets

he swore a lie ! Then I stood up and told the truth. No one believed me, and I do not blame them. It does seem improbable that one man should commit so great a crime for another man's benefit."

"Not wholly and solely, father," exclaimed Paul Wynter. "He surely derived some benefit, you did not derive all !"

"I did ; he had not a pound—not a penny."

"You have made my heart sick," said Paul wearily. "There seems to be some mystery here, which must be fathomed one day."

"No, no, Paul, do not try to fathom it—promise that you will not ! Let bygones be bygones ; even if *his* guilt had been proved, it could not have lessened *mine*. You must not try to right my wrongs, my boy—they will right themselves. I have learned a lesson, and now I believe in the Nemesis of sin. Avoid him, my boy — avoid him. You must not go ; I will not part with you till you have promised never to seek that man !"

"Father, my poor dear father, do not excite yourself. I promise this much, that I will never seek him." He did not say he would avoid a meeting. "But I must go now," he added, "or my stay will awake remark." He parted the old man's grey hair and kissed his brow. "I shall see you again to-morrow. God bless you ! Remember you are the sick patient—I am the prison surgeon."





CHAPTER XX.

A RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.

“Let Fate do her worst there are relics of joy,
Bright dreams of the past which she cannot destroy ;
Which come in the night-time of sorrow and care,
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.”



ALL things wore a pleasant aspect at Brooklands, both within and without, except where Lucy was concerned ; but the darkness which had lately overshadowed her seemed to have passed from her life now, and her way was brighter than before. There was no storm-signal in the sky, no token on the earth, nor in the atmosphere, that the current of their lives was about to change, to turn into a new channel, and flow onwards towards a sea of circumstances where clouds and sunshine, storm and calm, would vary the monotony of their quiet, uneventful days.

If we could only hear in the distance the rush of events that come hurrying into our lives, or receive some warning of their approach, we might prepare our minds to receive them. Silence in the atmosphere generally precedes a storm. The birds are still, the very leaves seem to whisper together in tremulous fear. We hear the tempest rising in the distance, the thunder muttering below its breath, long before it breaks over us ; but we cannot hear the footsteps of Time as he comes towards us, loaded with strange events and wondrous circumstances, which he hurls upon us with

an invisible hand ; we do not know whence they come nor where their end will be. We stagger blindly on our way, and wait.

It happened one morning as Margaret and Lucy were gently gliding over the bosom of the lake at Brooklands, their conversation wandered from one thing to another till they got to Switzerland, and chatted over their first meeting and adventures there. Of course Paul Wynter's name bubbled up, and they talked of him long, almost tenderly, wondering if they should ever see him again ! Margaret had never forgotten him, though she seldom spoke of him. As time passed on she had idealised him in her mind, forgetting his deformity, thinking only of his goodness, his soft voice, and his great sad eyes. Strangely enough, even while they were talking of him on that quiet lake, he and Mr. Brookland were standing hand clasped in hand in one of the most crowded thoroughfares of London !

While time was flowing on in a soft, luxurious fashion at Brooklands, Paul Wynter had been battling on his way in London, and a hard battle he had found it—mentally as well as physically. His spirit was harrassed day and night by the sad sounds and sights of that dreary prison home ; for, in truth, he made it home. He and the Governor had become great friends, and he spent as much time as possible there. He could not, however, spend as much as he wished with his poor old father ; as on some occasions, the old man had been so frequent and peremptory in his calls for the " Doctor," that he attracted the Governor's attention, who took an opportunity of remarking to Paul Wynter,—

" I am afraid, Doctor, you are too kind, too soft-hearted with these people. That old fellow 32 has made you a perfect slave to his whims and fancies. I understand he sends for you at all hours, and yet there is nothing the matter with him."

" Not much," replied Paul. " He suffers from general debility and the infirmities of old age. He is highly nervous and excitable."

The Governor smiled.

" I have heard of excitable, nervous women," he said, " But we cannot allow prisoners to indulge in such luxuries. You are too easy. I am afraid 32 presumes upon his former

position. You know, he is, or rather was, a gentleman. Here he is simply No. 32, a prisoner, neither better nor worse than his neighbours." He paused a second, then added, significantly, "You have no idea what jealousy there is among these criminal classes. If you were supposed to pay more attention to one than to another, especially to that old man, they would believe you to be actuated by class-feeling, and there would be a mutiny in the prison."

Paul Wynter turned sorely sick and sorrowful at heart. He quite understood, and was grateful for the Governor's caution. He felt he must do nothing to awake suspicion or rouse remark. Accordingly he took the first opportunity of explaining to his father how matters stood; and he had some difficulty in reconciling him to the new aspect of affairs.

"Tell them I am your father, Paul!" he exclaimed, peering eagerly into his son's face. "They cannot be so cruel as to forbid me the sight of you? Why, it is meat and drink to me! I could not live here without you!"

Paul Wynter shook his head.

"My dear father, do you not understand these things. If our connection with each other were to be discovered, I should lose all influence, all respect——"

"There's where it is!" exclaimed the old man, querulously. "You are as selfish as the rest of the world, Paul. Lose respect, indeed! You think more of yourself than of your poor old father; but I do not wonder at it. I know I have disgraced you, and it is natural you should be ashamed of me. I have no right to complain—no right to complain."

It was hard to be so accused, after all his self-sacrifice and daily endurance. But Paul Wynter made no attempt to refute the charge of being selfish and unfeeling. He only smoothed the old man's hand with a soft, caressing motion, as though he had been a fractious child, and said,—

"You did not hear me to the end—it is for your sake I speak, not my own. I should not only lose my influence over my patients here, but, if our connexion were discovered, I should be driven from *you*, and not allowed to practice here as the prison surgeon. We are both greedy of one

another's company, father ; but we must restrain ourselves. Remember, half a loaf is better than no bread. Trust me, I will see you whenever I can. You must not send for me too often, dear father, or, as sure as we both live, I shall be sent away."

The old man felt that what Paul Wynter said was true, and he grew frightened at the bare prospect of parting, and clung to him, exclaiming piteously,—

"Ay ! ay ! I understand ; but I shall hear you pass through the corridors. I should know your footsteps among ten thousand. You will promise to speak loud as you pass my cell door. Remember, my ear will be at the chink, and I shall thirst for the sound of your voice, as the hungry crave for bread."

From this time the intercourse between father and son was carried on with great prudence. Sometimes for days together they could find no opportunity of exchanging even a word in private. No. 32 grew suddenly and unaccountably anxious for work in the labour-yard, and got through his tasks, too, with wonderful exactitude and rapidity. All wondered, but none guessed the reason of this sudden fit of willing industry. The fact is, at certain hours of the day, Paul Wynter generally found some pretext for walking through the labour-yard in company with one or other of the prison officials. He was a favourite with all, and at all hours or seasons they were glad of his companionship. Even the most hardened and forbidding countenance brightened when the "Doctor's" kind face was seen among them. He had a pleasant smile or cheering word for all. His doctrine was always of hope and comfort. He treated them, not as criminals, who had done evil in the past, but as men who would do well in the future. He tried to sow the seeds of self-respect even in the most forlorn and abandoned. "For he who respects himself," he argued, "is in a fair way to respect others." He tried to lead their thoughts from what they were to what they might be. As he approached the labour-gang where No. 32 was working, he paused oftener and talked louder, that the sound of his voice might linger in one straining ear. As he came nearer still, he exchanged a hundred words with the old man's mate, in order to exchange twenty with himself. So time passed on.

There were moments when he felt that his burthen was greater than he could bear. The old man was often querulous and complaining. He spoke as though Paul had supreme power, and could do many things which were, in reality, impossible. At such times he reproached him for want of feeling and due consideration. But Paul never lost patience; he never forgot his father was a broken-hearted, branded man.

"It is his sorrow speaks, and not my father."

Dreary and sad, however, as his life was, it was visited by occasional gleams of brightness. All things, of course, go by comparison; and poor and pale as the brightness would have been to other men, it was grateful to him. For after leaving the gloomy walls of the prison, with its host of miseries and its moral degradation, his humble home smiled a cheerful welcome on him. The great red light that gleamed over his door seemed to him like the eye of a friend, glaring out through the darkness, watching to give him a greeting, and cast the reflection of its ruddy glow over his broken spirit. Margaret Griffiths was still an inmate of the house, and as thoughtful for his comfort as ever. Indeed life put on its most cheerful aspect at his own fire-side—it was no longer objectless and purposeless, as of old. He felt he was not a useless encumbrance on the earth. He made the sole sunshine of one ruined life, which, without him, would have been desolate indeed, and cast a ray of light on many poor benighted souls who dragged on a miserable existence within the prison walls, who had nothing but shame in the past, and in the present, and in the future, nothing but the hope he kindled. It was perhaps within his own home that his exertions bore the richest fruit. In the pure fresh soil of Margaret's mind, the seed he scattered took root, and grew and ripened and showed forth in her thoughts and actions. She was more patient, less wilful and passionate, than before. She subdued her own wild will, and even bowed submissively to the somewhat injudicious rule of Mrs. Lloyd. There were no complaints now of "that wicked child's temper."

When Paul Wynter returned in the evening, Margaret used the privilege of reporting to him the day's proceeding. She told him all she had said and done, and much that she

had thought ; undergoing a sort of self-examination aloud. Thus, he was able to guide her judgment, train her thoughts, and, to a certain extent, mould her character. It was a healthful task for him to cultivate her fresh, sinless nature. It formed so marvellous a contrast to the hard, world-stained, stubborn natures that occupied him during the day. Indeed, without the child's grateful smiles, and pleasant pretty ways, his dwelling would have been but a lonely retreat. She made it wear somewhat the look of a cheerful home. Of this he was fully conscious. One evening he had come home more than usually depressed, and she in consequence was more than usually watchful and earnest in her endeavours to please him. When their daily discussion was over, the books put away, and he wished Margaret good-night, he sighed, perhaps, unconsciously. She looked quickly up in his face, saying,—

“What is the matter? Have I done anything wrong!”

“Wrong! No, why should you think so?”

“Because you sighed and looked sorry.”

“Did I?” he answered. “Well, child, as you are here, I was thinking how dull I should be without you.”

“Should you really?” she exclaimed, her whole soul flashing up into her face and brightening it, as faces are not many times brightened even during the longest life.

“Yes, indeed I should,” he answered ; “I shall miss you sadly when you go away.”

“But I never mean to go away,” she said, and a frightened look crept into her eyes. “I shall stay with you as long as ever I live.”

“You are but a foolish child,” he said. “But do not be alarmed. I see no chance of our parting yet. Good-night.”

During the quiet hours of the night when silence and darkness sat brooding over a sleeping world, he was awake, and extracted the real sweetness of life from his own thoughts ; for there lay Margaret Brookland, bathed in everlasting sunshine, as fresh, fair, and beautiful as when he last looked upon her in the land of mountains. Like a miser, he hid her away in his heart ; and when the glare of the common day had faded, and the pulse of the great world was still, he summoned her from the depths of his memory, and feasted

on her beauty alone. He turned over the pages of the past, as men turn over the leaves of a book, till they come to a favourite history. He passed over every page till he came to the brief romance of his own life, which was called "Margaret." She was in truth to him a glorious lyrical poem, surrounded by the luxurious imagery of the poet's fancy, and graced with the sweetest flowers of his love. She was so far removed in his mind from the mere prose of common life, that she might have been a creature of another sphere, moving only to the music of God's making. He knew there was little chance of their ever meeting again, unless he sought her; and that he resolved he would never do. His love fed only on its own strength, and did her no harm, but it was the one great solace of his life. He fancied that no one on earth cherished a love so utterly without hope; but no man knows how much of hope mingles invisibly with the most hopeless passion.

The memory of Margaret came to him like sweet music, between the dull acts of his daily life; the curtain seemed to fall over the toil and trouble, stir and bustle of the day. All bitter pain, inquietude, and restless longing, were laid aside at rest; and she, like a blessed vision, came into his silent life, filling it with harmony divine. He little thought that Time, in his noiseless march, was bringing her nearer to him; that he should soon stand with her face to face; that he should see her clothed in no ideal perfection, but in all the natural grace and waywardness that God has given to womanhood.

His old friend Dr. Chapman had never deserted him. It is true he quarrelled with him one day for wasting his talents in such a place as Pentonville; but the next he forgave him, though he never could understand the mystery that kept him there, in defiance of good advice and the prospects of the success that lay open before him. Sometimes Dr. Chapman burst in upon him, in his boisterous hearty way, and carried him off home to dinner in Half-Moon Street, or perhaps to inspect some curious case that had come under his notice. More than once he found him looking miserably ill and overworked, and tried to tempt him away for a few days into the country; but somehow Paul Wynter could never make it convenient to go. One day, however, when he had tempted

him out a few hours earlier than usual, and was carrying him off in triumph, they were encountered in Piccadilly by Mr. Brookland. The pleasure of the meeting was unmistakeable on both sides, they clasped hands, and were loud and hearty in their greeting. Mr. Brookland reproached Paul Wynter for remaining a stranger to them since their arrival in England.

"I gave you my address," he said, "and you promised to pay us a visit, but you have broken your word. My daughter Margaret said—but you have forgotten your patient, I think, you do not ask after her."

"Forgotten her! No, indeed!" exclaimed Paul Wynter. "I hope she is well." He had hardly patience to answer; he was so anxious to hear what Margeret had said.

"Yes, quite well; but she looks upon you as a deserter, and considers that you ought to be brought to a court-martial as such. She has not mentioned you for a long time; I am afraid she has quite forgotten you."

"Ay," said Paul, and there was a hidden bitterness in his tone, a sadness in his smile, as he spoke. "A man need not go to his grave to be forgotten."

"Especially when he takes no pains to be remembered," exclaimed Dr. Chapman, somewhat severely. Then addressing Mr. Brookland, he added, "and that is the case with Mr. Wynter. He buries himself like a sick rat in a hole, and can only be hunted out by an old ferret like myself. I seize hold of him sometimes and give him a shake, but it is no good, he creeps back to his hole and mopes as much as ever."

"My kind friend here exaggerates," said Paul Wynter, as his eyes glanced gratefully on the doctor. "A man who has near upon two hundred patients on his hands, finds little time for moping."

"A man always finds time to indulge in his favourite vices, however busy he may be," answered the doctor.

"I think you are looking overworked," exclaimed Mr. Brookland, regarding him with a scrutinising eye. "You are too enthusiastic in your profession, Mr. Wynter; you overtax your strength."

"And if he does not take care he will be heavily taxed in return," rejoined Dr. Chapman. "Nature cannot bear too

much, and she will levy toll on his whole body ; and send his soul to Kingdom come."

"Oh ! but now I have found him, I shall not let him go again," said Mr. Brookland. "I shall carry him home with me, and expect him to make the humblest apologies to my daughter for his long neglect of us."

"If we unite our forces we may be able to drive him from the field of his labour," exclaimed Dr. Chapman, delighted at the prospect of driving Paul Wynter into the country at last. Paul himself was dizzy with delight at the bare thought of seeing Margaret once more. Fate had thrown the chance in his way ; he had never sought it. He felt it was a bliss almost too great for him to enjoy, and he made some faint attempt to put it aside, excusing himself on the plea of duty.

"Duty ! fiddlesticks !" echoed Dr. Chapman. "No more of that, Master Paul. I'll take your duty under my wing. If nothing less will suit you, I'll even kennel in your den, and look after your frowzy prisoners with a tenderness that will be most satisfactory to Jebb himself."

Dr. Chapman was earnest and honest in his offer, and Paul Wynter knew his word was to be trusted. Whatever engagement he made he was sure to fulfil it, not only according to the letter, but to the spirit to. In no better or more trustworthy hands could he leave the discharge of his duty. They talked the matter over as they walked along side by side ; and before they parted, it was arranged that in two days Mr. Brookland and Paul Wynter should start together for Brooklands.

"I shall not write and give notice of our coming," he said, "we will take them by surprise. And by-the-bye, there is another old friend who will help to welcome you to Brooklands. You remember the young lady who was so kind to my daughter at the Splugen Hotel ? She is now staying with Margaret, and I am sure she will be equally delighted to see you."

"Miss Nutford !—Lucy, I think, was her name. Oh, yes, I remember her quite well," replied Paul Wynter. "I have a patient, a namesake of hers, who keeps her name constantly before me, and who may perhaps be some relation."

As Paul Wynter spoke, Mr. Brookland remembered that Lucy had a brother in London, and bethought him, with some compunction, of the promise he had made to the old farmer, that he would take the opportunity of seeing, and if possible, of forwarding him in the world.

"Miss Nutford has a brother in London," he said ; "it would be strange indeed if your patient should be he. Can you ascertain that for me ?"

"Certainly ; or, if you please, you may ascertain for yourself. I shall be very happy to introduce you to him," replied Paul.

"I should be sorry to intrude upon a stranger," said Mr. Brookland. "You tell me he is your patient ; is he ill ?"

"Not exactly," answered Paul Wynter, "but he has some threatening symptoms, that require watching and great care. He is young and has great talent. He has been thrown too much into gay company, and lived a faster life than prudence dictates, as most young artists do."

"Ah ! he is an artist ! Then he must be the same," said Mr. Brookland. "I shall be greatly obliged, Mr. Wynter, if you will bring us together."

This Paul Wynter promised to do on the following day.





CHAPTER XXI.

WRUNG FROM THE HEART.

“I will unfold my grief,
Yea, though mine heart do break and burst,
I will drag forth its mystery, and show
The thing that eats away my life.”



R. BROOKLAND got through his own business with as much dispatch as possible, and punctually at the hour appointed made his appearance at Paul Wynter's lodgings, for the purpose of accompanying him on his visit to the young artist whom he believed to be Claude Nutford. His suspicion proved to be true. They found the young gentleman comfortably quartered in the most respectable part of Islington, a long terrace, with gardens in front of the houses, and balconied windows, which were for the most part filled with sweet-smelling, gay-coloured flowers. Claude Nutford occupied the first floor. The front room was a studio, and presented the usual untidy appearance of an artist's workshop, especially when the artist is a bachelor. There were odds and ends of all kinds, thrown together in strange confusion; bits of gaudy drapery, tinselled tissues, and calico embroideries, which, when arranged with due attention to taste and tradition, formed the costume of a Grecian beauty, a Roman matron, or even a Belgravian belle. Plaster casts, some defaced and broken,

were lying about ; a hand here, a foot there, a beautifully moulded arm strung up with the head of a satyr against the wall. In one corner, in a reclining posture, was a veritable skeleton, strung together with wires ; looking as though it had just cast off humanity, and was lying down to rest. The fleshless head, with its empty sockets and naked jaws, seemed to be grinning back on mortality, a sneer at the mockery it had found it.

As Mr. Brookland and Paul Wynter entered the room, they approached too near that "emblem of humanity," lying there so mute and still.

"Take care, take care," exclaimed a young man, hurrying forward, "you are going close to the spring. If you touch that, it may start forward and frighten you." And indeed Mr. Brookland was sufficiently startled at the idea of such an eventuality, and steered a long way clear of it during the rest of his visit.

Paul Wynter introduced him at once to the young artist, observing,—

"Mr. Brookland fancies that some friends of his are relatives of yours."

"I think Mr. Brookland is right," replied Claude Nutford. "My sister is now on a visit to a lady of that name at Brooklands Park."

"To my daughter," said Mr. Brookland.

"I have heard a great deal of her, Sir, and of you too," exclaimed Claude, while a flush of pleasure suffused his boyish face. "Lucy has written to me such glowing accounts of Brooklands, that I feel to know it almost as well as my own home. I think I heard you had paid a visit to our place in Cornwall."

"Yes, and I shall always remember it with pleasure. Rose Vale is a bright spot in my memory ; for I there tasted such hospitality and kindness as I shall not easily forget. Your father is one in a thousand."

"Yes, he is a brick, as things go, but rather behind-hand with the rest of the world. I am afraid you were obliged to take things all in the rough. Our Cornish folk require a great deal of polishing. I often wish my father would come up to town, and get a little of the country dust rubbed off."

"He is far better as he is, and where he is," said Mr. Brookland.

"But he would be none the worse for seeing a little more of the world—a little more of life."

"He would be all the worse for any life but that which God has marked out for him," said Mr. Brookland. "And as for his world, it lies round him in his golden corn and clover fields, and fresh green meadows; a far purer and healthier world than this, where life is a feverish struggle from day to day, and men in the noontide of their strength are fain to lie down and rest."

As Mr. Brookland was speaking, a host of conflicting feelings were working in Claude Nutford's mind. The boy's heart clung to the old home; he was glad to hear the lips of a stranger speak in praise of it. He was proud of his father's liberal hospitality, and yet half ashamed, and inclined to apologise, because that father drove his own plough, and laboured with his own hands upon his own broad acres.

Mr. Brookland read this in the boy's face; for, in truth, he was little more than a boy. He laid his hand kindly upon his shoulder, saying,—

"You have as much reason to be proud of your father's upright, honourable character, as he has to be proud of your genius."

"And I think you will say his pride is not without sufficient cause," exclaimed Paul Wynter, directing Mr. Brookland's attention to some exquisite sketches that lay in an open portfolio upon the table. He turned them slowly over, examining, criticising, and admiring alternately, adding value to his remarks by showing that he really understood something of the matter he was speaking of; whereas many who are styled "critics" and connoisseurs, walk through the world of Art, scattering praise and censure with lavish profusion—damning one picture, applauding that, yet knowing absolutely nothing, and their criticisms exhibiting evidence of their ignorance.

Claude was an enthusiast in his art; his whole soul reflected back the light, warmth, and poetry it gave him.

Paul Wynter, who had become acquainted with many of his characteristics, drew him out gently, and made him talk

of things he loved ; of his art, of his schemes for the future, and of all he hoped and intended to do. He spoke with so much fervour and earnestness, that those who listened to him caught a spark of his own fire.

Claude Nutford was indeed the very ideal of a young artist. There was a wild spirituality about everything he said or did. Between him and his sister there was a family likeness, a resemblance in the cast of countenance and the general tone of the features, but that was all. His face, indeed, his nature, too, wanted the steady strength of character that was evident in Lucy. There was no steadiness about him, he was all nerve and spirit—slight and gracefully formed, with white feminine hands, whose thin tapering fingers would have been beautiful in a woman, but were a little too womanly for a man. His large brilliant eyes looked as though they were using up the oil of life too quickly, and had already burned too deeply into their dark-rimmed sockets. When he talked warmly and excitedly, as he did when he talked to them, he was constantly interrupted by a short hacking cough that was most distressing to his hearers.

Mr. Brookland fidgeted about, and at last exclaimed,—

“It will never do to attack such a cough as that with big boluses or poisonous drugs—let me take him in hand just this once. If I do him no good, I can do him no harm, according to your belief.”

He took out his medicine-chest, and gave him a tiny phial of globules, with strict injunctions to take three every ten hours. But almost before he had finished speaking, Claude made some jesting observation, and swallowed the whole contents of the bottle. Mr. Brookland, in great trepidation, declared he had made an insane attempt at self-destruction, and administered an antidote on the spot. Paul Wynter looked grave, and rebuked Claude for meddling with things he did not understand.

Claude saw in a moment that he had vexed both his visitors, and he apologised with such pleasant frankness as would have atoned for a greater fault. He had such a bright, pleasant way with him, that it was impossible to be grave, if he chose that you should be merry. Mr. Brookland gave him a hearty invitation to Brooklands, which he

accepted for the following week. Mr. Brookland was deeply interested in the young artist, and expressed himself so to Paul Wynter as they walked along, saying,—

“Fate has been doubly kind to me, first in throwing you across my path, and through your means this young gentleman, whom, for his father’s sake, I should be glad to be friend.”

Paul Wynter walked thoughtfully on; and presently said, as though following his own thoughts, rather than answering Mr. Brookland’s words,—

“Young men are so obstinate! I wish I could persuade young Nutford to go home, and live among his father’s meadows, where he could breathe the sweet salt breath of the sea, instead of this smoke-laden atmosphere of London.”

“You seem uneasy about him—do you think he is threatened with consumption?” said Mr. Brookland.

“I fear so, and the life he leads tends to promote and develop the disease,” replied Paul Wynter. “Keeping late hours, smoking and drinking—if not deeply, at least more than is prudent—is ruination even to a man in health, but to him it is destruction.”

“I am sorry to hear this—heartily sorry, as much for his poor father’s sake as for his own,” said Mr. Brookland gravely. “We must see what can be done for him; he is evidently leading a loose life, and ——”

“Not more so than other young men who are cast adrift in London, without friends, without a home,” returned Paul Wynter.

“Without friends!” repeated Mr. Brookland—“a man cannot keep late hours, smoke and drink, unless he is in good company.”

“Query that last,” replied Paul Wynter. “Boon companions he must have, I grant you, but I cannot call them friends. Candidly speaking, Mr. Brookland, unless some great change takes place, I should never be surprised to hear the end had come. I have talked to him seriously, but he only laughs. He is all soul, vivacity, and genius. He cannot think that the dark shadow is creeping over his life—that he is marked to be cut down.”

“This is terrible to think of!” answered Mr. Brookland, deeply agitated; “that a creature endowed with such great

gifts, imbued with the beauty and brightness of life, 'should come up as a flower to be cut down like grass,' while I am left to outlive my generation, and grow old in a world of strangers."

"It is a good thing to grow old as you have done, with the honour and esteem of the many, the love of the few, clinging and closing round you till the last," said Paul Wynter; and his thoughts flew to one grey, dishonoured head that lay always next his heart.

They walked together to the "Angel" at Islington, where their roads separated. Then, having made their arrangements for the morning, they parted. Mr. Brookland jumped into a hansom, and drove to his club, where Mr. Joel Craig, and some few proposed members of the new gas company, were to dine with him that evening. Paul Wynter returned thoughtfully home. Dr. Chapman had promised to call upon him early, to take his instructions, and be introduced to the governor of the prison, before entering upon his new duties, though they were to last but a few days. He was always punctual, especially if there was anything to be done, and he had promised to do it.

On arriving at his lodgings, Paul Wynter found the doctor already there, amusing himself and teasing Margaret by a fabulous account of Paul's intended doings. He smiled, and soon set matters right; assured her he was only going away for a few days, and begged her to put all necessary things in his small portmanteau, as he should leave early in the morning.

Accompanied by Dr. Chapman, he went over to the prison; and after introducing him to the governor, went round among the prisoners, showed him his patients, and gave him such information concerning them as he thought desirable.

A dull pain seized hold of his heart as, glancing round the labour-yard, he beheld his father's grey, aristocratic head moving among the low, beetle-browed, sinister-looking men who formed the mass of prisoners—a striking figure in the background of misery and crime. His prison dress hung loosely on his thin, spare figure. His conscious aspect of hopeless degradation, his every look, his every movement, contrasted strangely with the hang-dog visage and shuffling

gait of those around him. He was among them, but not of them. Nothing could crush out the signs of the true breed that were stamped on every feature. The good old blood, which he alone of a long generation had tainted, glowed in his veins still, and sent crimson flashes into his face, as though it longed to rush out and spill itself on the ground in very despair at the shame he had brought upon it. Indeed, the old man looked like a creature of another sphere, who had dropped down by chance into that hideous den of human degradation. And so, indeed, he had—but the chance was sin, which, like death, levels all distinctions.

As Paul Wynter approached this poor broken figure his steps faltered, his brave heart sank, and his pulse beat faint and low. He felt that he could not command his voice to speak to him in the usual way to-day, and yet dared he to pass him by without a word? It would be hard—it would be cruel. He was going away in the morning; and for three whole days, he knew, the old man would languish for the sight of his face, the sound of his voice. Three days is not much in the ordinary flight of time, according to the almanac; but when the body or the soul is pining for bread or solace, it is an eternity.

Dr. Chapman was busy criticising countenances, hazard-ing facetious jokes, and guesses for what particular crime certain people were suffering.

"Now look at that sanctimonious varmint, No. 32," he exclaimed; "I will be bound he is here for some hypocritical scientific crime—he has not pluck enough to be a bold brave scoundrel. I should not wonder if he begins to quote Scripture, and say his prayers, as we get near him; his lips are moving already."

And so indeed they were, though no articulate sound came from them, as he saw Paul Wynter approaching with a stranger. A look of mute imploring agony was in his face, and into his eyes there crept a look of infinite longing; and while his hands were busily breaking the hard stones, his soul seemed to send out some invisible grappling-irons, that caught hold of his son's heart and drew it almost out of his breast; for, in truth, it rose up and stuck like a huge ball in his throat—his whole nature yearned over the old ruined man.

If he could, he would have taken him in his arms, and leaped away out of this dismal life—buried himself with him and his shame from the world's eyes for evermore. But that could not be; and while their hearts were aching and breaking, their lips were sealed. Not a word, not even a sigh of sympathy, might pass between them; their souls must be mute—their flesh held in bondage. Paul Wynter was seized with a nervous fit of coughing, and dropped his handkerchief close upon the old man's heap of stones; and as he stooped to reach it, he gently pressed his lips to the thin shadowy hand of the prisoner; and, in spite of his efforts of self-control, a great sigh surged up from the bottom of his heart, and burst asunder his closed lips. He was momentarily blinded by his emotions; he lost the power of his limbs, and remained for a second in that kneeling posture immovable. The father controlled himself better; he knew how much was at stake, and recalled Paul's words, "If our relationship were known I should be turned from the prison gates." He did not speak, for he was surrounded by the lowering faces of his fellow-prisoners; but his eyes said, "God bless thee!" in words as plain as eyes ever spoke on earth. He let fall his hammer, and with an unconscious movement his hand crept round his son's neck, with the same caressing motion as of old, when he lifted and played with the boy's bright curls years ago.

When Dr. Chapman saw Paul Wynter stumble (as he thought accidentally), and caught the prisoner's hand about his throat, a suspicion of foul play rushed on his mind. He uttered an angry oath, sprang upon the old man and seized him roughly by the shoulder. But the oath had hardly fallen from his lips, when Paul Wynter leaped to his feet, tore them asunder, and flung the doctor some paces off. A flash, brief and bright as the lightning, darted from his eyes. Then he smiled faintly, but with his lips only, saying,—

"Dear old friend, forgive me; I hardly knew what I was doing. I was afraid you would strike the old man, and it was not his fault. The sun dazzled me, and I fell."

He turned his back upon his father, and as he did so, he heard the hammer fall heavily upon the stones, and he fancied a cry mingled and was smothered in the sound of it,

"My dear old fellow," said the doctor, as they passed on their way, "you seem to be in a nervous fever. It is a lucky thing I came to look after you. The fact is, Paul, this prison life is killing you. You feel too much, you are too delicately organised for these dismal scenes of humanity. I wonder a man of your refinement can choose such an office as this you are filling now."

"It is not my choice!—God knows it is not my choice!" answered Paul, in a dejected tone, that irritated the doctor, as his quiet tone of resignation generally did.

"Not your choice!" he echoed. "What the devil do you mean? Did I not go almost down on my knees and beg and pray of you to reject this filthy dose, and take the plum I was ready to drop into your mouth!" Paul Wynter pressed his hand in answer, and the doctor resumed. "The truth is, you are labouring on barren soil, and you know it. You might as well strive to plough and sow seed upon a rock, as to sow good words or good deeds among these people—they will all be fruitless. Their ingratitude will sting you. I verily believe your old friend, Number 32, was going to rob you just now. I hope he will send for me while you are away. I should like to give him a dose, the hypocritical old th——"

Paul Wynter's hand was upon the doctor's lips.

"No! no! not that word even from you! Come here, doctor, come this way!" He dragged him off to a distant part of the yard, beyond the sight or hearing of the prisoners.

There they sat down upon a rough stone. Dr. Chapman thought his eccentric young friend was gone suddenly demented. Paul Wynter sat with his elbows resting on his knees, his face buried in his hands. He felt he could hide his skeleton in his own heart no longer—it must come out, even though it scared his good, his only friend away from his side for ever; but he hid his eyes, he could not see him turn his back and go.

"I know you have often tried to fathom the mystery of my life," he said. "You have hunted it down now. It is *here*!—concealed within these prison walls. That old man—I am"—his tongue clove to his mouth—but he would be

brave and strong, the truth must out—"I am—he is—my father! You know me now. I am—O God! I am a felon's son!"

He shrank away, and cowered down as though he would hide himself in the earth, and at least not see the change, the look of horror come over the kind face that had cheered him so often and so long. He would not feel the clasp of friendship loosen itself and fall away from his life.

But he felt a warm, strong clasp upon his hand, that seemed to lay hold of his heart also. There was no shrinking away! The doctor was literally dumbfounded. He could not speak—indeed, there was nothing to say. The truth, in all its cruel, hard outline, was there. He had no consoling words to utter; but there was a world of sympathy in his firm, strong clasp. Paul Wynter lifted his eyes to his friend's face, and saw that he was not cast out of his regard, but rather held the closer to his heart. Then he summoned courage and told him all, without disguise, the miserable story of his father's fall. He spoke nothing of himself, and yet his silent heroism shone out in divine colours before the doctor's humid eyes, and he said in husky accents, very unlike his usual bluff voice, "And for this you are giving up the world, losing your best days, and burying yourself alive here!"

"Why not? In what better way could my life be spent? I am all he has in the world, poor old father! and we love one another."

There was an accent of ineffable pity and filial love in his tremulous tones, that vibrated to the doctor's heart.

"I thought you were a hero, Paul Wynter," he said; "but, by God! you are a living martyr!"





CHAPTER XXII.

A WELCOME GUEST.

“Sir, you are welcome to our house ;
It must appear in other ways than words,
Therefore I scant this breathing courtesy.”



MARGARET and Lucy sat over their breakfast, chirping and fluttering like a couple of bright birds as they were. The golden sunshine falling from the soft billowy sky was laden with a strange sweetness, which seemed to creep like a subtle perfume over their senses, and fill them with its own light. The fresh brisk breeze, too, came dancing over the hills, laving them round and round, wandering caressingly over lips, cheek, and brow, quickening the pulse and making the heart bound with the leaping gladness of life. There was no special reason why they should be happier on this day than on any other—it promised no more, and they had no hope, no expectation that it would be unlike the rest ; and yet Margaret's heart thrilled and expanded with a strange feeling ; there was a mingling of joy, expectation, and wonder, as though a great gift was coming to her, and some ethereal spirit was striving to prepare her to receive it. Her every nerve, indeed her whole nature, seemed to resolve itself into some soft mysterious harmony. She revelled in the glory of living, and longed to rush forward and unfold the mystery of the days and hours that were to come, though all the while she knew she must bide God's time and wait.

The two girls sat there "theorising," as they called it, in a quaint maidenly fashion ; judging of the whole world by the light of their small experiences, dissecting human nature with a merciless imagination ; cutting out patterns and picking out lives according to their own design, making them as they ought to be, not as they are ; but, somehow, they could not make things go right, there would be some wrinkle they could not smooth out, some sharp corner they could not easily round. Then they laughed merrily over their own blunders, and left their imaginary labour incomplete. They forgot, for the time, in their foolish search, that He, the great designer of human nature and human lives, makes all things fit, all things right. That which to our blind eyes seems crooked to-day, will be made straight to-morrow ;—the great mass of men's lives, that looks like a tangled skein, with threads of many-coloured sins and sorrows running confusedly among it, marring the pattern, and throwing the whole out of gear—will all come right at last ; when the glow of Divine love falls over all, the colours soften and blend harmoniously, the design works itself out according to God's will, and in spite of the cross purposes that harass men's lives, we feel that all is well.

The post-bag was brought in, and Margaret emptied it of its contents. There were several letters for Mr. Brookland—those, of course, she put aside ; there was one for Lucy, and one for herself.

"Dear old dad, he never forgets me !" she said, and then proceeded leisurely to read the letter. Dimpled smiles played round her mouth.

"Lucy," she said, and the word was so full of suppressed pleasure, that Lucy looked up from her own home-news with silent expectation. "Papa has sent me such heaps of news," continued Margaret. "He has seen your brother Claude, and invited him to Brooklands."

"Ah ! I am glad of that," replied Lucy, reflecting back Margaret's glad look. "Dear old Claude ! I am sure you will like him."

"And he is coming down this afternoon."

"Who ? Claude ?"

"No, papa," replied Margaret ; "and he is bringing a friend home with him, and who do you think that friend is ?"

"Not Mr. Craig?" said Lucy, with a faint hope that it might be he.

"No, guess again."

"It is no use my guessing, for I do not know any of your London friends, dear," replied Lucy, her interest dying away.

"But you do know this one."

"Do I? then it must be Mr. Wynter," said Lucy.

"And Mr. Wynter it is," replied Margaret as she consulted her letter. "Let me see—papa says he will be down by the earliest train. I shall order the carriage at four, and we will drive to the station to meet them. I shall be so delighted to see Mr. Wynter again," and unmistakable signs of pleasure danced in her eyes at the thought of it.

"And so shall I," rejoined Lucy. "We shall have some delicious chats about those dreary old days when we were all shut up together at the Splugen Pass."

"Dreary old days!" repeated Margaret. "I think they were delightful days. I was quite sorry when the storm passed away, and our pleasant party was broken up."

"Well, yes," replied Lucy reflectively, "I think we managed to make ourselves tolerably agreeable to one another. You were the sick lamb of the party, dear, and had a double share of attention."

"You were all very kind to me," said Margaret, smiling softly at the remembrance of some pleasant trifles that crossed her memory. "Do you know, Lucy, I should not in the least mind living those few days over again; under exactly the same circumstances, of course."

"What?—accident and all!"

"Yes, even that ——"

"Providing that you had the same physician! Oh, Margaret," said Lucy, interrupting her archly.

"Of course," she answered; "I said provided all circumstances were the same, and he made part of the circumstances. But you do not seem half so pleased at the thought of seeing him as I thought you would be."

"I do not know to what unreasonable height you fancied my pleasure would climb," said Lucy gaily. "I assure you, I am very pleased—not quite so pleased as you are, perhaps ——"

"Then you ought to be."

"No, I ought not," she answered saucily; "remember he did not cure *me*." Seeing that Margaret looked vexed, she flung her arms round her neck, and added, "seriously, Margaret dear, I shall be almost as glad to see Mr. Wynter as you are. I have a very warm and kindly remembrance of him, but ——"

"But what?" asked Margaret.

"I shall say no more, or you will think me hard-hearted and cruel."

"No, I promise you I will not—go on."

"Well—I really cannot help it, Margaret—but the sight of any physical defect or deformity hurts and irritates me. I cannot bear it, even in an animal, but in a man it is terrible; it pains my eyes, as much as discordant clashing sounds in music pain the ear of a musician."

"Thank God, I am not so sensitive," murmured Margaret.

"Besides," continued Lucy, "deformed people are so horribly tetchy. I shall live in constant fear of treading, figuratively, upon Mr. Wynter's hunchback. You remember making some trifling remark once, and he chose to be so wounded, you were obliged to make a most humble apology—we had quite a scene."

"Pray do not remind me of it," said Margaret, shrinking away as though she had herself been wounded. "It was thoughtless and cruel of me to make a remark that could be misconstrued, especially by him, who was so good and kind to me."

"People should not be so ridiculously sensitive," rejoined Lucy. "A man must know that a humpback cannot, by the wildest imagination, be considered a beauty; and it cannot be put out of sight and forgotten."

"I do not know about that," replied Margaret obstinately. "A man may have many other fascinations besides those of form or shape. A great personal deformity may be hidden and forgotten beneath a blaze of spiritual and moral beauty."

"But moral beauty cannot blind our eyes, dear," said Lucy, "whatever glamour it may cast over our other senses,"

"You remember Mr. Renshaw, do you not?" asked Margaret suddenly.

"What! that hideous little man who came to see your father's roses the other day?" answered Lucy.

"But ugly as he is, you said yourself that as soon as you began to talk to him you forgot his ugliness," said Margaret, triumphantly.

"Did I? I forget all about that," replied Lucy. "I only remember that I dreamed of him for a week afterwards."

"Well," rejoined Margaret, "in spite of what you call ugliness——"

"I!" echoed Lucy. "Did anybody ever call it anything else?"

But Margaret went on, taking no heed of her interruption. "He has married the handsomest woman in the whole county."

"That proves nothing, except that she was hard-up for a husband. Like the girl in the fairy-tale, she had gone through the wood, passed over the stately trees, and was obliged to take the crooked stick at last."

"No such thing," said Margaret. "I have heard that many women, young, rich, and handsome, were positively in love with him."

"It is a gross libel upon our sex, dear. Do not believe it."

"You are in one of your wicked fits, Lucy," replied Margaret, laughing. "I see you are determined to have it all your own way, so I shall not talk to you any more upon the subject." She turned the stream of conversation into a different channel; but from that time Margaret never cared to make Paul Wynter the subject of conversation between them.

She found her good old nurse a far more congenial *confidante*. Paul Wynter's name was quite familiar to her ears; she had heard of her dear young lady's accident, and all his kindness and care. She was delighted when Margaret told her he was coming down to Brooklands that very day, and was anxious to devote herself, heart and hand, to his service. She proceeded at once to make all necessary arrangements for his comfort. The best room

namely, that with the brightest, pleasantest, and most extensive view, was to be occupied by him. And while she undertook all domestic care for his comfort, Margaret charged herself with the decorative part. She put on her garden-hat, furnished herself with basket and scissors, and busied herself among the flowers, snipping off the finest, without regard to the young buds that still clung unopened to the delicate stem. She filled whole vases with richly-scented, various kinds of roses; and having stripped the garden of it greatest pride, she paid a visit to the conservatory, and made sad havoc there, gathering those flowers of the most gorgeous colour and sweetest perfume, never heeding their rarity or their value. Some hours after, when the old gardener came in to look after his mute, many-hued nurslings, he looked round him in dismay, lifted his hands, and shook his head, apostrophising his absent mistress.

"Oh! Miss Margaret! Miss Margaret! t'aint so much what you've took, as what you've spiled." And he proceeded to bind up the bleeding, broken stems, with as much care as he could have used if they had been sentient beings, endowed with the power of feeling. Margaret meanwhile flitted about the house as happy as a bird. She felt so glad and grateful to be able to show some hospitality to the dear old friend who had been so kind, so patient with her during her brief affliction. She racked her brain to find means of amusing him during his visit. She had no idea how long he was to stay, but she was so afraid he might find it dull. Her vivid imagination organised picnic parties, pleasure excursions to distant parts of the country, also a voyage of discovery in search of some Roman remains, which somebody had said existed about ten miles from Brooklands; but nobody as yet had been able to find them out. The dissipation was to be crowned by a ball at Brooklands. She forgot, in her eager desire to keep him well entertained, that his misfortune might render him too sensitive to appear amid the scenes of gaiety she was so busily sketching out.

Punctually at three o'clock she and Lucy started for the station. They had arrived there but a very few minutes, when a shrill scream in the distance warned them that the train was approaching. They watched the thin white smoke,

curling gracefully upwards, as it came labouring nearer and nearer. Presently it dashed into the station, snorting and steaming furiously, as though these constant curbs and stoppages were the bane of its fiery life.

Margaret and Lucy were both upon the platform, watching the scanty number of passengers who descended by twos and threes from the long line of carriages, but failed to find those they sought for. A blank look of disappointment came to Margaret's face.

"I suppose some unexpected business has detained papa in town," she said, casting a last glance round, when a white head appeared, and Mr. Brookland's figure descended cautiously from the very last compartment. No, there he is!" she added, and went quickly towards him. "I was afraid you had missed the train, papa; and, oh! Mr. Wynter, I am so glad to see you!" she added, as Paul Wynter's frail delicate figure sprang out behind Mr. Brookland. A small gloved hand held his in a soft firm clasp.

Eloquence does not consist in words only, but looks and tones, and even inarticulate sounds. A look will sometimes reach the heart and make it tremble, when the warmest words, marred perhaps by a single accent, sleeps in the ear. Margaret's words were such as, under the circumstances, she might have spoken to any man; but her glad look, and the soft intonation of her voice, gave them weight to him, and sank them into his heart, where they rested and reproduced themselves, and made sweet music.

They were soon seated in the carriage and rolling through the wild flower-scented lanes to Brooklands. Paul Wynter never forgot that long delightful drive. He appeared to be riding straight to heaven through a glorious land of dreams. Life seemed drained of its bitterness; all the anguish and sorrow of it had passed away, and was no more remembered. Even the face of the poor old father in his gloomy prison shadowed itself in thin faint lines upon his memory; he had never been so free from its ever haunting presence as now; all the sad, sorrow-tinted hours of the past seemed brightened or lost utterly in the flood of light that fell from one fair girlish face, and surrounded him body and soul. He could hardly believe that she, who had come to him only as a beautiful vision,

to brighten the silent solitary hours of the night, keeping herself alive in his memory through some invisible agency, was beside him now, talking as ordinary mortals talk, using the self-same words and phrases, only beautifying, by the utterance of her sweet lips, our common language, and giving it, to his ears, a charm it had never before possessed. He would have liked to shut his eyes, and let his thoughts follow the sweet words she was scattering carelessly to the wind, as a musical accompaniment to the words of the singer ; but that good breeding forbade. He roused himself accordingly, and talked too. They discussed the beauties of the different counties, from the bright Derbyshire hills to the soft green lanes of Devon, and they even wandered away to the wide wolds of Yorkshire. Paul Wynter had spent some months in the great northern manufacturing towns, and wandered, at his own pleasure, through the wild, bleak country, spending whole days and nights upon the lonely moors. His mind was stored with quaint anecdotes and generally forgotten traditions, which he had gathered from the old inhabitants of the towns and villages ; and even as they rolled along these green woodlands, little anecdotes bubbled up from his memory, and mingled with the stream of conversation that flowed pleasantly, until they came to the end of their journey.

"There, that is Brooklands !" Margaret exclaimed, directing Paul Wynter's attention to her ancestral home, long before the carriage rattled over the drawbridge, and stopped at the wide-open hospitable doors ; and long before his feet touched the threshold, he had taken in every feature of the fine old place, as far as the eye could reach.

The heart of Mr. Brookland, and his daughter's also, was gladdened by the genuine burst of enthusiasm that escaped Paul Wynter's lips when his eye first fell on the time-honoured mansion that lay gleaming grey in the sunshine, surrounded by its picturesque, wide-spreading domain. So calm, serene, and grand it looked—such a contrast to the brawling life he had left behind him ! If he could have rendered himself invisible, he would have knelt down upon the threshold, and prayed for God's

blessing upon the fair young mistress of all this earthly good, that she might never know a sorrow. Vain prayer it would have been ! Though riches may smoothe the world's way for weary feet, swathe the limbs in luxuries, and keep the wind and the rain from beating down upon the fair face, it cannot keep the heart free from sorrow, nor ease it of a single pain.

He was awakened from his momentary abstraction by Mr. Brookland, who, casting a satisfied glance round him, exclaimed,—

"You have got but a faint idea of Brooklands at present. When you have made yourself better acquainted with it, and penetrated the pleasant nooks and shady places both within and without the house, I think you will find your admiration considerably increased."

"I am to be show-woman, please, papa," said Margaret. "Come, Mr. Wynter ; I shall lead you off captive to your room at once."

"Where are you going to put him, Margaret?—in the Oak Room?" inquired Mr. Brookland.

"No, papa, that is the gloomiest, though it may be the grandest ; and I have chosen the pleasantest for Mr. Wynter. If he does not like it, he can easily change."

"There is an opportunity for you to make a pretty speech, Mr. Wynter," said Lucy.

"Pretty speeches are not much in my way," he replied ; "I am generally content with honest ones."

"But it does not follow that other people are as easily contented," answered Lucy ; "and, you know, women like pretty speeches, as they like many other pretty things."

"Speak for yourself, Lucy," laughed Margaret.

"And I can answer for you too. Now do not pretend that you dislike compliments, Margaret, for I have seen you revel in them, gathering them up from all sides, as a honey-bee gathers honey from the summer flowers."

"Oh ! of course," answered Margaret carelessly, "I am obliged to be content with compliments, when my friends have nothing better to offer me."

"As much as to say she expects something better from you," rejoined Lucy, addressing Mr. Wynter.

"And so I do," she answered. "Do not take your cue from Lucy, Mr. Wynter. I should not value complimentary speeches from you. I would much rather that you speak as you think,—I hate flattery."

"You may safely trust me so far," replied Paul Wynter; "but my thoughts, you know, may be your greatest flatterers. How then?—am I to speak or be dumb?"

"Yes," said Margaret gaily—"as dumb as Balaam's ass."

"Then I am free to speak; for Balaam's ass was not dumb at all—remember it spoke; at least, it brayed at last. But whatever I may say or think, my heart must always be full of gratitude for the welcome I have received at Brooklands."

"We should be most ungrateful if we gave you anything but the best and warmest of welcomes," said Margaret; and as she spoke she gave him her hand with genuine feeling, adding archly, "But do not be grateful too soon; you do not know what else you may find at Brooklands."

Did she speak in an unconscious spirit of prophecy? Whether or not, her words fell like a foreshadowing of evil on Paul Wynter's ear; for one who has been well accustomed to fortune's blows never knows when he may be hit again, and is apt to live in perpetual dread of an enemy in ambush; as a man who walks in suspected places is for ever looking round in fear of the assassin's knife.

"Here are your rooms!" exclaimed Margaret, throwing open a door and ushering him into a perfect nest of roses. "And I hope you will find everything arranged, and—ah! here is my nurse," she added affectionately, as Mrs. Foster came forward smiling and curtsying; "I have told her all about you—how kind you were, and how you made yourself nurse and doctor both. She loves me so well that she is almost as grateful to you as I am, and means to devote herself to you all the while you are at Brooklands. She is responsible for your comfort, and I for your entertainment. It is exactly two hours before the dressing-bell rings. Papa will be in his study; Lucy and I are going to the lake. If you like to follow us you can, and I will show you some of my haunts."

She turned and left him ; and while the music of her voice still lingered on his ear, Mrs. Foster, with a face wrinkling all over with smiles, and a fat comfortable voice, took immediate possession of him, and made some necessary inquiries about the disposition of his luggage, etc. ; and as he answered her, he looked upon her almost with eyes of affection—he could fain have embraced her ; for had not Margaret been cradled in her arms ? her fair head pillowed upon that portly breast ? Mrs. Foster was evidently inclined for a long gossip ; and as her “ dear young mistress ” was her theme, he would willingly have stayed to listen, but Margaret herself was lingering by the lake, perhaps watching and waiting for him. Thither he hurried, and found her and Lucy seated in a fairy boat, with a pair of toy-like elegant oars, which she held in her hands with the air of one who knew well what she was about.

“ Come, step in,” she said, greeting him with a pleasant smile. “ Which do you like best, sculling or rowing ? ”

“ Rowing for me,” he answered, “ sculling for ladies ; for even the management of those fairy-like oars on this tranquil lake is an exertion for a pair of delicate hands.”

“ Oh ! but I have been accustomed to rowing ever since I was a child ; ” and she bent to her work with such graceful ease and skill as to realise the poetry of motion. The regular musical splash of the oars, and the dreary sound of the gurgling waters, mingled with their rippling laughter and merry voices, as they floated over the bosom of the lake. Margaret carried them near to the swans’ nests, and the graceful creatures came gliding out from their reedy home close up to the boat, and took bread from the hand of their fair mistress, who had tamed and taught them to obey her voice as well as feed from her hand. If that tiny boat could have gone on and on, till it glided upon the shores of eternity, Paul Wynter would have been content.



CHAPTER XXIII.

HOME AT BROOKLANDS.

“Love is a child that talks in broken language,
Yet then he speaks most plain.”

BLESSED days were those which Paul Wynter passed at Brooklands ; but they flew too rapidly for him. Their mornings were spent in wandering about the grounds, or on the borders of the lake, which seemed to sleep as pure and tranquil as a guileless child. Sometimes they strolled through acres of dark pine trees, which gave fragrance, while they offered shade. There seated on some rustic bench, they allowed their thoughts to wander freely, conversing without restraint upon any matter that caught their fancy.

“From grave to gay, from lively to severe.”

It was a refined pleasure to him to watch the working of Margaret's fresh unsullied nature, as it showed itself in all her words as well as her most trifling actions. It was easy to observe that Lucy, though she had seen far less of the world, was much more shrewd and worldly-wise than her friend. He admired the one, but adored the other. The words of the poet came often to his mind :—

“Die when you will you need not wear
At Heaven's court a form more fair
Than beauty at your birth has given ;
Keep but the lips, the eyes we see,
The voice we hear, and you will be
An angel ready made for heaven.”

Paul Wynter was not one of those rattling talkers who fire off empty nothings like blank cartridge, making loud reports, but nothing more. Nor did he seize a passing observation and twist and turn it about until it assumed some complimentary shape, and then cram it indiscriminately into the lady's ear that was nearest. He was not very well stocked with "table talk," that pleasant gilded nothing that often passes current through society, and is even more valuable than gold itself; for a man who carries about him only ingots of gold, may sometimes want a meal, while he who is well stored with the current coin, in baser metal, may fare sumptuously every day. In passing through the world it is not necessary to be always sensible, always clever, or always witty; but it is necessary to be amusing and agreeable, to give and to take. Thus it is that men with comparatively shallow minds, but possessing a sparkling surface, are often sought for, and are more prized in general society than those made of sterner stuff. Though they will bear but once skimming, yet their cream is pleasant enough, and answers its purpose. It is all that society wants, and society is satisfied.

Paul Wynter was not calculated to shine in general society. He saw all its glare and hollowness, and shrank from it. In large assemblies he was silent and reserved, but as a home-companion, a social fire-side friend, he did shine, and made the hours fly. A playful, tender kind of wit wandered through his sayings; but his thoughts sometimes broke forth in flashes of humour that had a world of melancholy pathos in it, and sent unbidden tears into thoughtful eyes. It often happened so during their solitary rambles at Brooklands. Margaret wanted to learn something of the life which he kept so guarded, indeed so concealed. He never liked to talk of himself, but at last she won him round to let her peep into his life. He told her, one morning, that he was surgeon to a prison, and gave her brief sketches of the things he saw and heard there, and in other places where his daily life was spent. She was shocked at the scenes of misery his words revealed to her.

"How can you choose to live such a life as that?" she said. "Surely you cannot be happy in the midst of such dreadful things?"

"No," he answered, "I do not expect to be happy. I never allow myself to indulge in such a delusion. I see so much misery and sorrow, and so little happiness, that I forget to grumble because I am shared out."

"You have no right to be shared out," replied Margaret; "I believe there is enough happiness in the world for everybody to have a slice."

"But some people cut such large slices," said Lucy, "they leave the rest to starve."

"I would willingly give a part of my slice to anybody that wanted it," replied Margaret.

"You do not know how constantly your liberality is flowing," replied Paul Wynter, his large sad eyes softening and brightening at the same moment—"you give without knowing it, and are unconscious of the blessings you bestow. You do not know how much happiness the very sight of your face, the sound of your footstep, may bring into some lonely life; nor how much influence you may be silently exerting now."

"I wish I had some influence over you," replied Margaret, blushing and pleased, she scarcely knew why; "I would not allow you to play with your life, and throw it away, as you are doing now."

"There is no man on earth whose life is of so little worth, or who would be so little missed if he dropped out of it. There is but one, one solitary soul in all this world, who would regret me—but one, to whom my existence is absolutely necessary."

"How do you know that?" said Margaret; and in her secret heart she wondered who that "one solitary soul" could be. "Out of your own mouth I can convict you. What would those poor sick creatures you have told me of do without you?—who would soothe the sick and comfort the dying one half so well?"

"Hundreds," he answered. "You do not know with what patient self-denial medical men devote themselves, when they find patients who need their devotion."

"I often wish I had been born a man—they have such useful working lives," said Margaret, thoughtfully. "I am no use to anybody, except, perhaps, to papa, and I do nothing for him, except ——"

"Make all the sunshine of his life," said Paul Wynter, finishing her sentence for her.

"Yes, and then help to plague him out of it," she rejoined, archly. "You know you were lamenting this morning that women were compelled to lead such helpless, idle lives."

"Did I say 'compelled?'" I meant satisfied," he answered. "Of course there is an exception to every rule, but most women are content to go to their graves through a series of gaieties, operas, and dancing-parties, hunting down one pleasure after another, herding together in crowds, rendering themselves ridiculous in their search for novelty, filling their days with vapid follies—indeed, trying to make their lives a paraphrase of a three volume novel."

"There your simile is wrong, Mr. Wynter," exclaimed Lucy. "Three volume novels, as a rule, are not full of 'vapid follies,' they rather teem with sins, sorrows, and variegated emotions. I have never yet seen the heroine whose life I should like to call mine."

"I have seen hundreds," said Margaret; then, as Paul Wynter turned his eyes inquiringly on her, she added, "Oh! I am not going to tell you who they are, or you would catechise me upon the why and the wherefore, and I hate to be obliged to give a reason for everything I say. This much I will tell you, their lives were made up of flashes of joy, and strokes of intense misery."

"Have you ever felt intense misery?" asked Paul Wynter.

"No, but I have often felt intense weariness," she replied. "Of course, I do not feel it now that Lucy is with me; but in the winter time, when we are quite alone at Brooklands, it is very dull. It is true I have got dear papa, but I seem to want something more. We are very much together, and yet very much alone. He has a world of business matters to attend to, of which I am no part; and I—well, I have got my world too," she added, after a slight pause, "but nothing comes of it. I often walk up and down the terrace here for hours together, think—think—thinking, 'God has given me my life, what shall I do with it? It seems too much for some things, too little for others. I want to make the best of it, but somehow I cannot piece it out rightly.'"

"We can none of us make more of our lives than God

permits us," replied Paul Wynter; "but the worst is, we do not always make enough of it. When I hear of lives being weary and lonely, I know there is a mistake somewhere. There is always work laying ready for every hand, if we go the right way to find it."

"Do you think you could tell me where to find mine?" said Margaret, looking dreamily into his face.

"I think I could," he answered, quickly, as the thought of the orphan Margaret flashed across his mind; but for him she would be a waif and stray upon the sea of humanity. "I think I could put a noble work into your hands to do, if you would have the kind heart, and the courage, to undertake it."

"Tell me what it is, and let me try," she said, with sparkling eyes.

Paul Wynter gave her an account of the old soldier's death, and of the manner in which the young girl had drifted into his care.

"I am sure I shall always feel, to a great extent, responsible for the child's well-being. I know I have undertaken a difficult task. I may fail miserably, unless I find what I most want, the help of a woman—like yourself, Miss Brookland."

"I will do my best, my very best—indeed I will," she answered, earnestly. "But when do my new duties begin? You leave Brooklands to-night, but you come back again on Saturday—you must, we shall take no refusal—and you will bring the little girl with you. But first tell me how old she is, and what is her name?"

"She is a child-woman," he replied, "but I do not exactly know her age; I fancy she must be about fourteen. Her name is Margaret."

That name fell lingeringly from his lips, and there was a softness in his voice as he uttered it, that sounded almost like a caress.

"My namesake!" repeated Margaret. She thought her name had never sounded so sweet to her ears as when his lips had uttered it; and yet it was not *her* name, but the name of the child whose cause he pleaded.

"Yes," he rejoined, "your namesake, Miss Brookland; perhaps it was that very fact that unconsciously roused my

first interest in her. Things happen so strangely. You see, our meeting in those wild mountains was not quite in vain—it has borne fruit for this orphan child Margaret; but for me and you, now, she would be utterly friendless. Your name has been a veritable talisman —”

“Do not say that,” said Margaret, interrupting him quickly; “the only talisman has been your own kind heart. You would have done exactly the same if her name had been Peggy, or if she had had no name at all. She must be quite a little heroine, to have lived with the old man through those terrible delirious fever-fits, and never spoken a word.”

“She has all the good qualities from which a good and noble woman may be made. Quite understand me; I do not wish her to be made one of yourselves, and lifted out of the sphere in which she was born; I wish her to be taught how to live in it, and to make life pleasant to herself, and pleasant to others. I think you will find Mrs. Foster a powerful ally.”

“I will do whatever you think wisest and best,” said Margaret. “I only wish her grandfather had lived, that we might have done something for him. It seems hard for a brave old soldier to die with no other prospect than a pauper’s grave.”

“Yes,” replied Paul Wynter, “there are many hard things to be borne, and much hard work to be done in this world. There are hundreds of living men who would envy the fate of the old soldier, even though he had gone to a pauper’s grave. Death is often the great—the only sweetener of a bitter life.”

“I cannot conceive that anything in life can be bitter enough to make death sweet,” said Margaret.

“Because there are some few people who can sit at home, under the blessed shelter of their own roof, and know nothing of the world beyond. Thank God you are one of these! You know nothing—how should you?—of the persecution, cruelty, meanness, and treachery that is going on in the world, where men are sometimes knocked about, and dashed upon the hard invisible rocks of this smiling civilised world, till the better part of human nature is beaten out of them—the man dies out, and the brute alone is left! There

are men who struggle through a long life of sin and shame, not self-made, but an inheritance, that chokes up all honourable ways, makes the sweet waters of life stagnant, kills ambition, and renders life a hopeless struggle against an enemy that will not be overcome, that will not die, but leaves its foul mark everywhere. To know all this, and still struggle on, is hard work indeed."

"How can we tell our enemy will not die?—nothing is everlasting," replied Margaret.

"No, but it may last our time; and, so far as we are concerned, that is everlasting to us," said Paul Wynter.

"I do not believe that any trouble is insurmountable," replied Margaret; "it may be giant-like and crushing to feeble minds—it may not die, but it may be disarmed. We may learn to live it down. I know it would be hard, but are not the best soldiers sent to the front? and when a ship is in danger, are not the best and bravest men set to work to fight against the waves, and bring her through the storm? It may be the same in other things. God gives the hardest work to those he loves best; and when it is all done and over, think of the honour and glory of the victory!"

She put all the strength of her soul into her words, and her face glowed with the earnest fervour of her thoughts. When he spoke with such sad, despairing bitterness, of the man "who struggled with sin and shame," she felt instinctively that he spoke of himself; and in her enthusiasm—her yearning desire to soften his trouble, she unconsciously stretched out her hands towards him. He caught and held them for a full moment in his, and looked into her face, with all his great soul drawn into his eyes with an expression of rapt adoration, as though he had been engaged in the mute worship of a saint. He had forgotten himself—he had forgotten her; he was recalled to himself as her face slowly crimsoned beneath his earnest gaze. He dropped her hands suddenly, and said,—

"If I had a friend in sorrow, I would send him to you for comfort."



CHAPTER XXIV.

A DECLARATION.

"I found thee of more value
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags ;
And 'tis the very riches of thyself
That now I aim at."



HE carriage that bore Paul Wynter from Brooklands rattled slowly over the drawbridge. He waved his hand, and gave his parting adieux to the ladies who stood at the library window, watching his departure.

"Well, I must say I am sorry he is gone," exclaimed Lucy, turning from the window, "he is so pleasant, so sensible, and talks so well, too. Whenever he opens his mouth, one seems to learn something."

"Yes, and he is such a perfect gentleman, too," said Margaret. "I do not mean a thing made up of smart waistcoats, neckties, and kid gloves, such as every fashionable tailor sends out by the dozen ; but a gentleman of nature's making, stamped with every seal and sign complete. I think, if Mr. Wynter were sweeping a crossing, we should feel inclined to curtsy as we passed—at least *I* should."

"Well," said Lucy slowly, "I do not carry enthusiasm to such sublime heights, at least where Mr. Wynter is concerned. I like him extremely ; he is one of those companions of whom one never gets tired. But I do not admire him at all ; I like to see a fine, manly-looking fellow, with some physical attractions, and great personal strength."

"Oh! I know your taste exactly," replied Margaret, laughing. "A monstrous creature, with long arms and legs, big whiskers, round blue eyes, and a large voice! I know the kind of creature well enough; but, unfortunately, when nature is so lavish with the flesh, she stints the spirit. It is the small bodies that generally contain the great souls. Of course there are exceptions; but large heavy people are rarely so intelligent as those of smaller race. You remember your own Cornish legend? The big, fat, lumbering giants, but little Jack vanquished them all. Poor little Jack! he was always one of my favourite heroes; when I was a child, I was quite in love with him."

As she finished her sentence she turned round and encountered Mrs. Creamly, who was always free to come and go at Brooklands. She had entered the room unseen by them, and partially overheard Margaret's last sentence. She greeting the two girls with her usual courtesy, then added playfully,—

"But what is that I heard about falling in love, my dear? I never heard of such a thing, excepting in a charade."

The last few words were evidently flung at Lucy, who promptly answered,—

"How can you say such a thing as that, Mrs. Creamly? By Mr. Creamly's account you have played a very prominent part in that same farce yourself; but I suppose that was so long ago, that you have quite forgotten it."

Now, as the truth must be spoken, Mr. Creamly had one particular fault. When labouring under any special excitement, he would make tender allusions to the early stage of their mutual affection, which, to a certain extent, violated Mrs. Creamly's matrimonial confidence. This mode of proceeding was peculiarly offensive to his wife; and Lucy knew it. Mrs. Creamly replied to her angrily,—

"Mr. Creamly has too much delicacy of mind to speak to you upon such an indelicate subject."

"But surely *you* could not be an indelicate subject on anybody's lips, especially on Mr. Creamly's?"

Mrs. Creamly looked as if both dignity and modesty were offended, and silently ignored Lucy's presence, and directed her attention solely to Margaret, who observed,—

"I was going to drive over to you to-day, as I was

afraid you were unwell; it is so long since we have seen you."

"I am glad you think it a long time, my dear, though in reality it is scarcely a week," replied Mrs. Creamly, shaking out her skirts, and seating herself comfortably. "But, you know, I am so afraid of intruding, that I never come, when you have company, unless I am expressly invited."

"But you know you will always find a welcome here," rejoined Margaret.

"Yes, but if I came in search of it too often, I am afraid I should not be able to find it."

"But how do you know we have had company?" inquired Margaret; "though I hardly think that entertaining a single gentleman can be called company."

"Oh, I know all about it," replied Mrs. Creamly mysteriously. "It was a Mr. Wynter. I had never heard of him before, yet I thought I knew all your friends, by name at least. Is he one of the Leicestershire Wynters?"

"I do not know," answered Margaret candidly. "I have never had the curiosity to inquire. We met Mr. Wynter abroad."

"Humph!" exclaimed Mrs. Creamly. Then after a moment's silence, added: "You know, my dear, I think it is a very dangerous thing to pick up casual acquaintances; no good ever comes of it. It may be a little peculiar, perhaps, but I must say I like to know who's who."

"And I must say you deserve great credit for the trouble you take to find out," said Lucy, who could not resist the temptation to throw in a word.

"And, by-the-bye, dear Margaret," said Mrs. Creamly briskly, "that reminds me of something else. I heard Sir Roderick Howden dined with you the other day."

"Quite true, but it was not a dinner-party; only ——"

"Pray do not apologise," interrupted Mrs. Creamly. "I did not expect to be asked. I know you have so many important friends to entertain; of course if we occupied our proper position in society, things would be different. I know you never intentionally neglected me, my dear, and I do not envy those who are more fortunate than myself. I have no petty feelings. But speaking of those Howdens,

Margaret. I suppose I ought to say Lady Howden. What sort of a person is she ? ”

“ Well, really, I did not notice particularly,” replied Margaret ; “ but she seemed a nice, kind-hearted motherly woman. There was nothing particularly striking about her.”

“ Exactly what I should have expected,” said Mrs. Creamly with a satisfied smile. “ Well, Margaret dear, of course I should not refuse to meet anyone at your father’s table, but I must say I am glad you did not ask me to meet that person.”

“ What has that unfortunate person done to deserve to be denied the pleasure of your company ? ” said Lucy, who always availed herself of every opportunity to throw in her word.

“ Of course, my dear, what I say is in the strictest confidence ; I do not wish to influence you in the least against them —— ”

“ No, I should not allow anyone to influence me against my father’s friends,” said Margaret, pointedly. “ If there is really anything against them, I would rather not hear it.”

“ But you ought to hear it,” rejoined Mrs. Creamly. “ I have found something out about her ladyship that she would rather have kept concealed, if she could. Do you know who she was ? ”

“ No, I have never taken the trouble to inquire ; it is quite enough for me to know what she is—no matter what she was.”

“ Ah ! my dear, in your position you can afford to do that sort of thing—I cannot ; for though I am not proud, yet I have some self-respect. But, as I was going to say, she has been a very fortunate woman—not that I envy her, but I cannot help feeling ; and when Mr. Creamly told me, I said Margaret ought to know it.” Margaret’s ears tingled ; she began to think there really was something serious to be told, and she listened with downcast eyes as Mrs. Creamly continued, “ I have it on very good authority. She was the daughter of a miserable dissenting minister, who preached in some dirty alley ; lived with a drab of all work, and let lodgings ! Who knows, her ladyship may have cleaned the lodger’s boots and shoes ! ”

"Is that all?" exclaimed Margaret.

"All!" rejoined Lucy; "I think it is quite enough, that the husband of a dissenting minister's daughter, who let lodgings, should sit upon the bench; while poor Mr. Creamly, who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, is chained to a desk in a banker's counting house! The very thought of it is enough to create a rebellion in the heart of human nature! Oh, Mrs. Creamly," she added, laughing, "what a famous female detective you would have made! If I had any friends I hated, you are just the kind of woman I would engage to hunt them down; for I must say, considering you are a lady with no small feelings, you carry on the war pretty well. I cannot comprehend how you manage it."

"I should never expect you to comprehend the feelings of a gentlewoman," replied Mrs. Creamly, with lofty reproach.

Lucy smiled, took up her worsted, and before the answering word could fall from her lips, Margaret arrested it, saying,—

"Say no more upon this subject, Lucy; I am sure papa would be angry if he thought we discussed his friends in this way. He has a great respect for Sir Roderick Howden and all his family, and has a great dislike to tittle-tattle, especially when it takes the form of scandal."

Although she addressed herself to Lucy, of course her speech told on Mrs. Creamly, who saw she had gone too far, and had ruffled Margaret's usually gentle spirit. She had made a mistake, but was not going to acknowledge it, even by a word.

"I quite agree with you, Margaret dear," she said; "but *some* people never know when a subject should with propriety be dropped. I thought it my duty to speak to you, and have done so. I need hardly say I shall mention the subject no further, and I hope other people will be equally discreet." She cast an emphatic look on Lucy as she emphasised the words "other people." Margaret then invited her out into the garden, and so the matter dropped.

It was on the Monday that Paul Wynter left Brooklands, and on the Wednesday Claude Nutford arrived, in accordance with Mr. Brookland's invitation. Lucy went by herself to the station to meet him, as Margaret thought

that brother and sister would like to spend the first hour of meeting alone together. Claude's artist soul glowed within him as the picturesque beauties of Brooklands unfolded to his view; and when he caught sight of the ancient hall itself, his enthusiasm was unbounded. Feasting his eyes in all directions, he exclaimed,—

"It is a place to dream of, Lucy!"

"But I think you will find it a delightful place to be awake in," replied Lucy. "I hope you will like Margaret—I am sure she will like you."

"I daresay I shall," he answered carelessly; "by your account she seems to be a jolly sort of girl."

Mr. Brookland met them on the threshold, and gave Claude a cordial welcome.

"My daughter," he said, presenting him to Margaret, who stood by his side. "And I am sure she will make Lucy's brother as welcome as Lucy's self."

Margaret answered, smiling, "That is pledging your word for a great deal, papa; but I will try to redeem it." She came forward and shook hands with Claude in a frank charming manner, adding, "If Mr. Nutford is half as much inclined to be happy as we are to make him so, I do not think he will have cause to complain."

At the first sound of her voice, Claude blushed scarlet, his lips half opened as though he were about to speak, but he kept his eyes fixed firmly on her face, and held her hand so that without an effort she could not disengage it. Lucy tapped the ground impatiently with her foot. She could not think what had come over the boy—he was not usually nervous and shy.

"Claude has seen so much to admire at Brooklands, I do not think he will ever forget it," she said, coming, as she thought, to his assistance.

"Never!" he answered, as Margaret's hand dropped slowly from his. There was a genuine enthusiasm in his voice, as he added, "I have dreamed of it in a dim hazy sort of way, but I have never seen it until now. I will paint it, and it must gain the prize."

"I am glad you have already seen something of Brooklands worth immortalising," said Margaret. "I have seen some of your sketches, and think they are very beautiful.

I see you have got your portfolios, and I shall look for another treat."

Poor Claude was literally bewildered by Margaret's amiability and beauty. He had never seen so much grace and refinement, accompanied by the many other qualities that combine to make a woman beautiful. When his eyes first fell upon her, as she stood in the golden sunlight, he fancied he looked upon the embodiment of his art, the realisation of his secret inspirations. For a moment he was overpowered, like one whose senses are intoxicated by the perfume of a flower. He could not speak to her. She fancied his thoughts had flown away to his art, when he was thinking only of her—or rather so combining the two, that they were inseparable.

He looked upon her with the eye of a poet and a painter, and felt the power of her beauty with the heart of a young, impassioned man, to whom love, except in its feeblest, weakest sense, had hitherto been a stranger. He followed Miss Brookland up the wide staircase, watching her motions, and listening to her voice, as we sometimes watch the up-soaring of a lark, while listening to its song, and half expecting the envious clouds to wrap it from our sight. At the end of the corridor, Mrs. Foster made her appearance, and he was given into her charge; and although she overwhelmed him with civilities, he regarded her as his mortal enemy, for as soon as she appeared upon the scene, Margaret had vanished from it. Finding that he did not respond to her civilities, but rather received them with a silent, absent air, Mrs. Foster, having strictly fulfilled her duties, left him to himself. When Lucy entered the room about half-an-hour afterwards, he was still seated in the chair, where he had first thrown himself with flushed, excited cheeks, and an eager brightness in his eyes, as though the light of genius and beauty had kindled a fire in his brain that would never die out, until life itself was dead. And not even then, for the power of genius can immortalise as well as create beauty. His sister had come into the room to make some common-place inquiry or remark. Instead of answering her, he lifted his glowing face to hers, exclaiming,—

"Oh! Lucy, is she not divinely beautiful? I never

thought God had made anything in flesh and blood so lovely!—I fancied we could only dream of such creatures.”

“Are you talking of Miss Brookland?” said Lucy, with wide open eyes.

“Of whom else could I be talking?” he said, excitedly. “Of whom else could anybody talk, or think, or dream, having once seen her?”

“My dear enthusiastic Claude,” replied Lucy, smiling. “Fortunately her charms are not so universally effective. She is very pretty, I admit ——”

“Pretty!” echoed Claude. “Why, *you* are very pretty, Lucy, but you would not compare yourself with her!”

“‘Comparisons are odious.’ You have written that in your copy-book often enough,” replied Lucy, reddening slightly. “But I shall never be jealous of Margaret, Claude; not if all the world went on their knees and worshipped her. She is so good, so pure and true, I do not wonder at your admiring her.”

“If I were never to see her face again, I should never forget her—not if I live a hundred years!”

“And you have seen her exactly for the space of ten minutes,” said Lucy, archly.

“Ten minutes!” echoed Claude; “a single second is enough for the lightning to strike a man blind or dead! A moment suffices for the sun to photograph the pyramids, the work of ages, or to throw the impress of a thousand men upon a sheet of blank paper; and it takes a less time still for God to photograph the face of a woman upon the brain of a man. And, oh! Lucy, if I have the courage to look at her long enough, her face will gain me the prize!”

“What!” exclaimed Lucy, “make Miss Brookland’s beauty a matter of mercantile consideration! For shame, Claude, I never thought you could be so mercenary!”

“Mercenary!” repeated the boy, for in truth he was little more than a boy; “Do you think I would do it for money? No, it is for the honour and glory of it, that her face may carry off the prize from a thousand other beauties that have been chosen, dreamed of, or created by the greatest men of the time; and the whole world for centuries to come will stand entranced by the face that I have made immortal! We pass away, we die and are forgotten—painter

and subject may both lie mouldering in the dust together—but the work lives, the painted picture of dead beauty smiles on through generations of men, delighting and entrancing thousands. You have never seen the ‘Cenci,’ Lucy? It has been painted three hundred years, yet all the world flocks to see it still. Some doubt and debate whether it ever was the portrait of a living woman. I believe it was. The painter must have drunk in the glory of that face, and sent it fresh and living from his pencil to the canvas. No art—nothing but God’s own hand could have produced such loveliness!”

“What an enthusiast you are, Claude!” exclaimed Lucy, stroking the bright fair hair caressingly, and looking very proud of her young artist brother.

“What other men have done for other beauties, I shall do for Margaret—I may call her Margaret to you, Lucy, when there is no one near?—*she* will never know it, and it will be such a comfort to me to be able to speak her name. Margaret!—Margaret! What a beautiful name it is!”

“Dear old Claude, you must not talk or think of Miss Brookland like this, or you will be falling in love with her.”

“Falling in love! What a tame, stupid phrase!” he answered contemptuously. “As though I did not adore her already!”

“Nonsense, Claude!” said Lucy sharply. “Pray do not talk such folly to anyone but me, or you may get us all into trouble. But come, make haste; arrange yourself, and come down quickly, or we shall keep luncheon waiting.” And Lucy descended the stairs with a slow, thoughtful step; she knew her brother’s wild impulsive nature, and how obstinately his mind retained an impression it once received.

“He must be cured of this mad folly about Margaret,” she murmured impatiently. But the cloud deepened on her brow as she vexed herself with the question how that cure was to be effected.

Claude was a long time making his toilet, and arranged and re-arranged himself many times before he could make up his mind that he was fit to appear at the luncheon-table. He was particularly anxious about the set of his waistcoat, the bow of his necktie, and the spotless purity of his boots,

He wondered what was Miss Brookland's favourite colour, and wished over and over again that he had asked Lucy, in order that he might have worn it. He tried one tie after another, as a girl dressing for her first ball tries flowers of varied hues, till she finds that which becomes her best. He was equally difficult to please, and having satisfied himself in one particular, he grew nervously anxious in another. There was one vexatious curl that would not go right—do all he could, it would not fall in the right direction, and he was forced to be content to let it lie as it would ; but during the whole of luncheon time he was in a state of mental uneasiness. He fancied, every time that Margaret looked at him, she was attracted by that odious curl. Then he began to wonder if his parting was straight and on the right side. At last, when luncheon was over, Lucy proposed a walk through the grounds, and over the hills to where there was a fine view ; and Margaret smilingly made some allusion to his exquisite toilet, remarking that thin patent leather boots were not best calculated for walking through long damp grass, or rough country roads.

Poor Claude blushed scarlet ; a guilty feeling came over him ; he felt as though she had penetrated into his heart, and found out all the secret pains he had taken to please her eye, and was now laughing at his folly. She saw that something she had said had pained him, though she did not know what ; but she did her best to set him at his ease, and succeeded but imperfectly. During the first part of their walk he was nervous and shy ; an awkward feeling came over him, as though he had more arms and legs than he knew what to do with. Lucy chatted gaily enough, and Margaret talked, or tried to talk, to him on light passing subjects, but he was silent and uninterested. She fancied he was dull and stupid, till she began to talk to him of painting, poetry, and music. Then he warmed up ; his whole soul seemed to rise and plume itself, and soar away into the realms of fancy and imagination. There was such wild enthusiasm, so much freshness of thought and feeling in all he said, and something so naïve in his way of saying it, that Margaret was charmed with him, and whispered aside to Lucy that she had by no means over-rated her brother. He was in the seventh heaven of delight, and felt as though

he were walking through the air instead of on the ground ; for was not *she* by his side, talking to him, smiling on him, and literally intoxicating him with the perfume of her beauty, for the very air, as she passed through it, seemed redolent of "Margaret!" Once, during their long delicious ramble, he remembered that only a few hours ago he had dared to speak of this adorable creature as "A jolly sort of girl!" Now, when he thought of it, he was so shocked at the profanation of the idea, that he was inclined to go down upon his knees, own his fault, and ask her pardon.

The halo that surrounded Margaret extended itself and touched her father's grey venerable head. Claude Nutford conceived quite a romantic affection for the old man. To him he could be demonstrative, and show how much he felt. If he only touched his hand, or walked with him arm-in-arm, it seemed to bring him nearer to Margaret. Mr. Brookland was pleased and gratified by the reverential attention and watchful tenderness of the boy, who hovered constantly round him, anticipating his wishes, and winning his regard by a thousand unobtrusive small attentions. The enthusiastic young artist was grateful to God for having made the sunshine ; and some such sentiment he felt for Mr. Brookland, for had not he too created a sunshine that reached into his soul, and made the world glorious? Without him Margaret would not have been. Life at Brooklands was so sweet and novel to Claude, that he seemed to be living in an earthly paradise, and for the time forgot there was a world beyond it. There was an air of ease and comfort rarely to be found, combined with the stately munificence that characterised Mr. Brookland's household.

"Come, Claude," exclaimed Margaret, "it is much too warm to walk this morning, and I feel languid and tired—I want to be amused. Bring down that huge portfolio which you keep secreted in your dressing-room. We have looked over the smaller ones."

Colouring with pleasurable excitement, he hastened to do her bidding, and in a few minutes returned bringing his portfolio with him.

"There, now you may come and sit down beside me," said Margaret : "but do not speak, I want to try and find

out the meaning of your picture without your explanation. Mind, I expect something very beautiful."

"Ah! my poor sketches!" he sighed. "But they will be beautiful when *you* have looked upon them. The dullest daubs must brighten beneath your eyes! The gloomiest spots are lighted up when the sun shines.

"That is not bad for a young beginner," said Margaret looking at him with an arch yet pleased expression of countenance; "but you want practice. You meant it for a compliment, did you not?" she added innocently.

"No, I meant it for truth," he answered, lifting his large impassioned eyes to hers with an expression so intense, so soul-absorbing, that her own sank beneath them. She blushed with some confusion, and commenced turning over the sketches, making inquiries and remarks as she laid them aside one after another.

"These are much better than your sketches at Rose Vale, which first attracted papa's attention. You have very much improved," she said.

"I ought to be," he answered—"I am much older now than I was then."

She had taken up an elaborate, but still unfinished sketch, and was looking on it with a thoughtful, but puzzled air.

"I am trying to make this out," she said, "but I am afraid I must give it up. That girl upon the couch is sick or dying, and she is stretching out her hands imploringly to that little white bird, but it will not look at her; then these people grouped round her all with such intent, yet varied expression of faces—who are they?"

"I have endeavoured to illustrate an Oriental legend, and I mean to paint it in oils some day," replied Claude, glowing with delight at being appealed to by her. "The legend goes, that when the 'calandre' is brought into the room of a sick person, if it looks at the invalid, recovery is certain; but if it turns away its head, it is looking away from death—the sick must die."

"Ah!" sighed Margaret, "I think I understand your picture now."

"See! the sick girl is stretching out her arms towards the bird with a lingering look of hope that is half despairing, in

her eyes, and a smile of anguish on her lips; she is too young to die. The mother tries to look cheerful, chirps to the bird, and holds out the seed, enticing it to turn its face that way, and look upon her child. The father, in grim gaunt despair, clutches the girl's hand, and looks half defiant, half entreatingly, at the bird, which strains to get away, for the air is death-laden. It sees, it feels the dread shadow that is falling on the golden head, stealing away the life, and sealing the sweet eyes in darkness for evermore, and the poor bird shrieks aloud in its agony."

"And who is he that has brought in the bird, and seems to be watching with such mute misery in his face, that it almost brings the tears into my eyes, to look at him? He seems too young to feel so acutely."

"It is the young who feel the most acutely; although he has the face of a boy, he has the heart of a man, and—he loves her." His voice grew tremulous, almost pathetic, as he spoke. After a moment's pause, he added: "If I had been he, I would have strangled the bird, and flung it dead at her feet."

"It is a charming legend, and beautifully illustrated," said Margaret. "I never heard it before, and yet I fancied I was tolerably well acquainted with the legendary lore of most countries."

"The legend is by no means a common one," replied Claude. "Mr. Wynter, whose mind is stored with all sorts of quaint, charming things, gave it to me."

"You know Mr. Wynter well?" asked Margaret, bending over the picture to hide the pleasurable emotion his name called into her eyes, and painted on her cheeks.

"I should think I did. He is the best and noblest fellow alive. You have no idea how he is beloved, wherever he goes, especially among the poor; for where poverty, misery, and disease is rifest, there he is sure to be found. In the filthiest fever-dens, reeking with disease and rank with wickedness, his hands and his heart are busy trying to make the soiled life clean, nursing and tending the sick in body, and comforting the sick in mind. I think—I really do—that he is clogged with some heavy grief, and is trying to kill himself; but he is too good—God will not let him die."

"Yes, far too good," murmured Margaret, without raising her eyes.

"If it had not been for him, I should have been dead long ago," continued Claude, with grateful affection, that found its way, and told in his favour, to Margaret's heart. "I was struck down with fever, ill, helpless, delirious, when they sent for him. You do not know what it is to be living in London lodgings alone. To your landlady, at least to mine, I represented just twenty-five shillings per week, neither more nor less—it was no matter whether I lived or died. In the busy bustle of their daily life, they could give me no extra care. I suppose he saw my forlorn state, and made himself my nurse as well as doctor. You cannot think what a blessed thing it is to find a tender friend when you are sick, neglected, and alone."

"Oh! yes, I can, for I know quite well," said Margaret.

"Through all my fever fits, when they say I was most violent, I remember his face distinctly—calm, kind, serene. I wondered who it was that cared for me so much. I knew afterwards. When he had been toiling all day among his prison patients and his poor, he used to come to me and watch through a great part of the night, doing everything for me, even to making gruel and mixing cooling drinks, and all so kindly! The very touch of his hand, so firm and resolute, and yet so tender, seemed to do me good. I am afraid of boring you, but the fact is, when I begin to talk about Mr. Wynter, I never know when to leave off."

"Pray go on, I like to hear you talk," rejoined Margaret, fascinating him with her sweetest smile.

"I think he has adopted me as a kind of younger brother," rejoined Claude, "for he seems to have no friends, poor old fellow! I fancy he feels his misfortune too deeply."

"What misfortune?"

"Do you not know he is deformed?" said Claude, in some surprise.

"Ah! true, so he is; but indeed I had forgotten it," replied Margaret.

"It must be such a terrible thing to be unlike other men. I would rather be blind, deaf, or dumb, anything but deformed," exclaimed Claude, unconsciously drawing himself

up, and exulting in the pride of his youth and comely figure, and stealing a glance at the mirror by his side. "I think, poor fellow, he feels that God has set his evil mark upon him, and made him an outcast from the homes of men and the hearts of women."

"How can he, or you, or any man tell that?" said Margaret, flashing a swift keen look upon him. "God may give to him what is denied to you!" Claude glanced up with a startled, inquiring look upon his face; and Margaret added, in her old quiet way, "Content—and a great soul is above misfortune. The heavier the cross he bears, the higher he carries it, and the lighter it becomes."

"I see you know how to appreciate goodness, under whatever guise you find it; but then you are scarcely a woman, you are more like an angel," said Claude excitedly.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Margaret, and for the moment she almost disliked the boy for being so rich in the lithe, graceful attractions of youth. How dare he speak with such disparaging compassion of *him* who was sanctified by sorrow, and raised by his very humility above all other men.

She turned again to the sketches, from which their attention had wandered away. Claude was slowly gathering them together when she arrested his hand.

"No, do not put them up yet," she said, "I have not quite finished with them. What is this? What a delicious shady place it looks! I declare it makes one cool to look at it this warm sultry day. I fancy I can see the leaves tremble, and half expect to feel the fresh breeze upon my cheeks. It is a refreshing and delightful sketch—so suggestive, too. One feels inclined to lie down in that cosy nook and rest. How subdued the lion looks!—but it is not finished, is it? There seems still to be something wanting."

"Yes, there is life and soul and beauty wanted to make it perfect," replied Claude. "At present it is a mere sketch. I am going to try for the Royal Academy prize this year. I have chosen my subject, but I am afraid I shall never be able to carry out my conception, unless—unless I am more fortunate than I—than any man deserves to be."

He spoke with hesitating enthusiasm, and looked in her face with a yearning expression in his eyes, as though he longed to speak, to say more, and could scarcely put a curb

upon his tongue, that acted as a sort of padlock on his heart, and was ready to open it and pour out his secrets at her feet. She looked so sweet, so kind ; and every soft word she uttered, added fuel to the fire that was burning in every vein and kindling his artist-soul to a pitch of enthusiasm, that was carrying him fast beyond all self-control. Margaret was so absorbed, contemplating his work, she took no heed of him.

"Ah ! here is some poetry," she said. "May I read it ? I suppose that is the subject you are illustrating ?" And in her low, musical voice she read the lines, giving them a charm, even to his ear, that they had not possessed before :—

"One day, nigh weary of the irksome way,
From her unhasty beast she did alight,
And on the grass her dainty limbs did lay
In secret shadow far from all men's sight ;
From her fair head her fillet she undight,
And laid her stole aside : her angel face,
As the great eye that lights the earth, shone bright,
And made a sunshine in that shady place,
That never mortal eye beheld such heavenly grace.

"It fortun'd that, from out the thickest wood,
A ramping lion rushed suddenly,
And hunting greedy after savage blood,
The royal virgin helpless did espy ;
At whom, with gaping mouth full greedily
To seize and to devour her tender corse,
When he did run, he stopped ere he drew nigh,
And losing all his rage in quick remorse,
As with the sight amazed, forgot his furious force.

* * * * *

The kingly beast upon her gazing stood —
With pity calmed, he lost all angry mood."

"Oh ! I understand your meaning now," she said. "But, as you truly say, 'life is wanting.' Here is the soft green grassy resting-place, and the calm lion, but where is the lady ?"

"Here !" exclaimed Claude, with an uncontrollable impulse that it was in vain to struggle against, for it was irresistible.

His voice was full of emotion, his eyes with unshed passionate tears. He sank down slowly by her side, until he seemed to be upon his knees. He caught her small white hand, and would fain have covered it with kisses. "Here!" he repeated. "The only lady whose eyes could light up that shady place, as they light up my life, is—yourself! If I may not glorify my art by her beauty, so long as I live I will paint no woman's face! All that is best of me, the genius for my art, will die, and you will have killed it!"

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed Margaret, turning pale, and startled by his passionate words. "You do not know what you are saying. If you talk like this to me, I shall be afraid—I shall think that you are mad!"





CHAPTER XXV.

A CHILD'S REVELATION.

“A light comes o’er me from those looks of love
Like the first dawn of mercy from above.”

NO woman is ever displeased at being admired, especially when the admiration comes warm and fresh from the heart ; when youth, rising up from the quiet years of childhood, soars into the realms of passion, and lays the first fruits of his newly-awakened life before her, surrounding her with the poetry of imagination, idealising her natural graces, and gathering from her beauty the sweet bitterness of the “love that bringeth sorrow.” These first emotions of boyish nature are perhaps evanescent and brief, soon fleeting away, clearing the moral atmosphere for more lasting, calmer, holier passions. Like the first taste of sweet waters, they are delightful, not only while they last, but long after they have passed away. When the man has grown old and grey, he will look back with tender feelings on what is commonly called his “first love.” Margaret Brookland saw well enough the poetical passion with which she had inspired the boy. It was impossible for her to be blind to it. He had such a quaint, earnest way of showing his feeling, that she was amused as well as flattered by it, and alternately teased, played with, or petted him. He never renewed the subject of the picture ; but one day she reminded him that he had promised to paint her, and she was quite ready to sit to him. He was in ecstasies, and

commenced his labour of love upon the spot. He progressed well with it, too, for his heart was in his work.

On the Saturday Paul Wynter returned to Brooklands, bringing with him Margaret Griffith. Her eyes were red and swollen with weeping, for she did not like the thought of parting from him, even for the Paradise he had painted to her. He had had a hard battle to fight that week, with himself as well as with her; he had been so accustomed to the child's care and thoughtful attention, that he knew his home would be lonely without her; but it was for her good, and he was firm in his resolution to place her in Miss Brookland's hands. He impressed her so earnestly with the importance of the step he was about to take respecting her, and seemed so grievously hurt when she rebelled against him, that she stifled her feelings, and submitted quietly to his determination. In his presence, at least, she wore a calm face, and tried to appear cheerful, as though she was glad to go; but at night, when she went to bed, she sobbed herself to sleep. She fancied that her young heart could never ache again as it was aching then. He had soothed and sheltered the forlorn young thing in the poignancy of her last great grief, and she clung to him with all the strong tenacity of a wilful nature. She perplexed her brain to find out if she had said or done anything wrong, that he should wish to be rid of her. She knew he would miss her in many ways, and she too, ah! how would she miss him!—how could she manage to get on through a world of strangers, without his strong guiding hand to lead and control her? Young as she was, she was full of delicate pride as well as impulse, and, since he really wished her to go, she would not entreat to stay.

As they drew nearer to Brooklands, her heart swelled higher and higher; but she kept back her tears, or surreptitiously wiped them away. Her heart was really too full to feel any pleasurable emotion. Her curiosity, indeed, was excited by all she saw, yet she could not give it utterance, but looked on everything with a dull, uninterested eye, though she was silently registering everything in her mind, as the magpie stores his stolen treasures in his secret nest.

Mrs. Foster, to whose charge she was committed imme-

diately on her arrival, received her with motherly kindness, talked to her cheerfully, showed her about the house, and took her at last into a pretty, neatly-furnished room, with glossy chintz hangings and casement window looking out upon the kitchen garden, where the air was laden with the luscious perfume of the ripening fruit which hung temptingly from the boughs and branches.

It was an earthly paradise in the eyes of the desolate child, who, in her wildest moments, had never dreamed of living in such a place, and having such a delightful cosy nook, with its array of books and flowers, to call her own !

She clutched Mrs. Foster's hand excitedly, and her eyes lighted up, glistening with pleasure. The next moment the light died out, quenched with the rising tears that came unbidden to her eyes, as she thought of the mean dingy little parlour where *he* would henceforth be toiling alone, with no one to care whether his fire burnt bright, or his heart was sad or not. Bitter regrets bubbled up from her heart and poured out of her lips. The old days had gone, never to come back again !

Mrs. Foster put her arms round the girl, drew her to her breast, and let her cry out her tears and her sorrows there. It was such a relief to be able to speak, and in a wonderfully short space of time she was so far reconciled as to listen with interest to Mrs. Foster's plans for her daily life ; and in return gave her a history of her own brief years—talked of her dead grandfather, of his brave old broken spirit—all she had heard, all she had seen of him. Of course Mr. Wynter shone vividly in the closing scenes, and the girl's word-painting gave a Rembrandt-like colouring to the old soldier's death. Then she took the little box from her bosom, and showed the bits of faded ribbon, the tokens of honour he had won, which she guarded religiously, as though they had been the valued heirlooms of a noble race.

The respectful attention with which Mrs. Foster listened to the simple, though touching, story, quite won the girl's heart, and brought out the warm, affectionate feelings of her nature. To Mrs. Foster she could speak out, and show the grateful affection she felt already ; but to Paul Wynter she was dumb—a natural delicacy chained her tongue ; she

could only show him, by her mute though fruitful actions, how she appreciated him and his great goodness.

Miss Brookland had been very much engaged all the day, and was not able to receive Margaret Griffith till she came to dress for dinner. She had desired that the child should then be brought to her dressing-room. Mrs. Foster with alacrity obeyed the summons, accompanied by her young charge.

With hesitating steps and shy, downcast eyes, little Margaret approached her kind protectress. Margaret Brookland turned round with outstretched hand to receive her, saying,

"I am very glad to see you, my dear. You know you are my little namesake, and I hope we shall soon be good friends."

The girl lifted her great eyes to Margaret's face. The shyness dropped from them and left them unveiled, lighted up with amazement. Her cheeks flushed scarlet, and she seemed to retreat a step backwards, exclaiming,—

"Are you Miss Brookland?"

"Yes, indeed I am," returned Margaret, now in her turn surprised. "Why, did not you expect to see me?"

"I—I thought you were dead," said the child, in an under-tone, still keeping her eyes upon her face. "I am sure he said so once."

"My dear child, what a dreadful thing to say to Miss Brookland!" exclaimed Mrs. Foster, deeply shocked. But Margaret, whose curiosity was thoroughly awakened, said quietly,—

"Never mind, nurse, you know I am not fanciful. You had better leave us alone, while we make one another's acquaintance."

The two Margarets were no sooner alone together than the girl's unaccountable excitement gradually subsided, and her shyness soon melted away beneath Miss Brookland's sunny smiles and soft, conciliatory ways. She tried to throw over the young stranger a kind of home feeling at once, by employing her in sundry small matters. She directed her where to find and how to lay out her dress, her ribbons, etc., for her dinner toilette. Dispensing with her maid's assistance, she shook down her long bright hair, and asked the child if she would like to brush and help to

arrange it. Margaret Griffith was rather nervous at first, and touched the soft silken mass as though she was afraid to hurt it. By degrees, as she grew more familiar, her hand lingered among the trailing tresses with a soft caressing motion, that made Miss Brookland declare she was mesmerising her; and finding that her young protégée had never heard the word before, gave a humorous explanation, which made her laugh heartily. Finding that she was growing more and more unrestrained, Miss Brookland said carelessly,—

"By-the-bye, my child, why did you look so astonished when you first saw me? Did you expect to find me older, uglier, or handsomer?"

"Oh! no! no! nobody could have thought that," she answered, earnestly.

"I suppose, then, I reminded you of somebody you had seen before?" continued Margaret.

"It was not that," replied the girl, gravely. "I had never seen anybody like you alive before!"

"But, surely, you have never seen one dead?"

"No, only a picture," she answered, blushing crimson.

"A picture like me?" repeated Miss Brookland. "I should very much like to see it."

"If you ask Mr. Wynter, I daresay he will show it to you. It is so like, I should think it must be you except ——"

"Except for what?" asked Margaret; and though she asked the question with a calm face and unaltered voice, her heart fluttered in her breast like a caged bird.

"Well," replied the girl, "because you look so happy, so beautiful, and good. I do not think you would do anything to grieve anybody."

"Indeed I would not—especially him!"

"But I am sure *she* did," continued the girl, "because he is always sad and grave when he looks at her. I have often watched him when he did not think it, and heard him talk to her. But I think she is dead now."

"Why?"

"Because he once told me to pray for her always, and one does not pray for the living, you know. Her name is Margaret—the same as yours and mine."

"Are you sure—are you sure of that?" said Margaret

Brookland, shaking the long bright hair over her face, that the child might not see the soft light that came into her eyes, and covered her cheeks with blushes.

From that moment the intimacy between them ripened quickly. The child's tongue was unloosed—she could talk of Paul Wynter without restraint. She repeated over and over the small incidents, all she knew, of his daily life, his self-denial. His patient perseverance and his goodness all oozed out among these broken fragments of conversation. Unconsciously she betrayed the secrets of his life to Miss Brookland, and told her all she had longed to know. Margaret Brookland knew instinctively, from a thousand trifling things, unremembered until now, whose portrait it was he gazed at and grieved over. But why grieve? Surely she had given him no cause for that? They had always been good friends. Mentally she resented his looking with sad eyes upon her pictured face—that could do nothing to console him,





CHAPTER XXVI.

AN EVENING WALK.

“What say'st thou, wise one?—that all powerful love
Can fortune's strong impediment remove?
Nor is it strange that worth should wed with worth,
The pride of genius with the pride of worth.”

SHE took her place at the dinner-table that day with a new strange feeling within her. She was perhaps a trifle more silent and shy than usual; as though there was some mystery between their two hearts, of which the world knew nothing. He was the same courteous and agreeable companion as ever, joining in trite arguments, and promoting the conversation if it flagged for a second. Although he chatted frequently, and on general subjects, yet there were many thoughts and sentiments which he seemed to address solely to her. He and Claude Nutford held a long and animated discussion on the arts, as to which was the greatest—poetry, painting, or music. Of course Claude was in favour of painting, and the young painter's enthusiastic eloquence brought out the quiet humour of Paul Wynter in bold relief; but it had no effect on Claude.

“You are too warm,” said Paul Wynter at last. “You take up your argument from the wrong end, and lose sight of reason.”

“I cannot help it,” returned Claude; “I shall be enthusiastic on that subject till I die.”

"Then you must die quickly," said Paul Wynter, a pleasant light kindling in his large luminous eyes; "for the world soon tames down enthusiasm, and gives a kind of moral shower-bath to the warmest imagination."

"Does it?" exclaimed Claude. "Then it will drench and drown mine utterly before I give in. How should we progress if the glory of imagination did not beautify and gild the dull dead realities of this world?"

"Reality is the living moral life of this world," replied Paul; "imagination too often casts but a phosphorescent light upon dead impossible things, but the glitter passes away."

"But the highest imagination tries to realise itself," interrupted Claude.

"And generally fails," rejoined Paul Wynter. "Come, Master Claude, have not you, and I too, seen some things real, a living breathing beauty, that has made imagination pale?"

Claude blushed and glanced guiltily away from where Margaret sat, and stammered out something to the effect that he "used the word imagination in a poetical sense, for without imagination there would be no poets."

"Well," replied Paul Wynter, "I know of no specimens of humanity that could be more easily spared. There are few poets who really fulfil their mission, which is to elevate and purify mankind. They give way instead to airy nothings, full of pretty fanciful conceits, or meander morbidly through worlds of their own creating, filling this with vain regrets and windy sighs; pointing out, with morbid sensibility, the evils of this life, but suggesting no cure; grieving for what *might* have been, instead of being content and making the best of what *is*. Your fine high-flying poet is generally a little cracked, Master Claude; and I dislike cracked poets as much as cracked china; but the one may be mended, the other is beyond repair."

"Do not believe a word he says, Claude," said Margaret; "he is only trying to tease you. I have heard him repeat poetry by the hour, ay, and quote it as though his heart was in it, too."

Paul Wynter was caught in his turn now, and had to defend himself.

"We all have our hours of idleness," he said, "when we are apt to amuse ourselves with light things and slight."

"And considering you were amusing *me*," replied Margaret, "that is not a very polite speech."

"Ay, but the mere fact of amusing *you* might make all the difference," he answered.

"Ah! that is a Jesuitical speech," returned Margaret; "it cuts two ways—it may mean one thing, or it may mean another. Which way am I to take it?"

"Whichever way you please, because I am sure your way will be the right one," he said.

When dinner was over, Mr. Brookland retired to read his *Times*, and the young people went out for a ramble through the shrubberies, and across the park. Lucy started off with her brother. She always contrived to separate him from Margaret, if possible; she was afraid of his forgetting himself, and saying some foolish thing, that would compromise himself and her. Margaret was consequently left to Paul Wynter's care. Their conversation during the earlier part of the way was of the most desultory character, touching merely upon the current matters of the day. They walked and talked as any mere acquaintances might have walked and talked while wandering amidst such soft, picturesque scenery as surrounded them. Presently their thoughts darted back into the old time—to their parting at the Splügen, and their meeting again at Brooklands. Margaret spoke most affectionately of Lucy, and of what a dear congenial friend she had found her.

"And to think," she added, "that it should be through your means we have become acquainted with her brother! He is wonderfully bright and clever, is he not?"

"I thought you were going to say 'he is wonderfully handsome,'" replied Paul Wynter, smiling—"that is generally a woman's first thought."

"You know nothing about it," returned Margaret. "I do not believe women care the least whether a man is handsome or not. Remember Titania fell in love with an ass."

"Yes, but her eyes had been first rubbed with the juice of 'love in idleness.' There are no kind fairies now to befriend those whom nature has defrauded. There is but one

way in which a man can so befriend himself. If he can throw gold-dust in the lady's eyes, she may find him pleasant to look on."

"That is the first mean, ungenerous speech I have ever heard you utter," said Margaret, half seriously, half in jest. "What has gold to do with a lady's liking?"

"With all women it is something—with many women everything," he answered.

"I am almost inclined to quarrel with you for your gross libel on my sex," said Margaret. "You regard us women as mere mercenary machines, and give us no credit for either heart or brains."

"At least," he answered, "I am willing to give *you* credit for a double share of both."

"Then you give me credit for more than I possess," replied Margaret archly. "If there should ever be a great demand—a run, I think, is the mercantile term—on either heart or brain, I should soon become bankrupt."

"Well, in that case," he answered, in the same tone, "you would find me ready to stand your friend; all I have should be placed at your disposal."

"Ay, but I am afraid that, like the rest of your sex, you would turn usurer, and demand exorbitant interest for very small capital."

"That would entirely depend on the state of the market, and if you offered honourable terms," he answered.

"How could we offer any other?"

"Well, not exactly; but you might take a mean advantage of us—such as blinding our eyes, muzzling our understanding, or, worse still, robbing us of our hearts."

"There is no robbing in the case," she answered. "In the game of hearts it is exchange, not robbery. A woman does not say, 'Stand and deliver!' but waits till she is sought and won."

"Ay, but that same winning is a difficult art. Few men outlive the learning of it."

"It is no art at all," replied Margaret, "but merely a natural science."

"A golden one," rejoined Paul Wynter.

"Ah!" exclaimed Margaret, "there you are again, with your wicked, slanderous insinuations! But if gold has such

a pernicious influence on our sex, pray what is its effect on yours?"

She spoke with arch playfulness, never supposing that her words could be misinterpreted, or even for a moment misunderstood. The fact that she was rich, and he was poor, never entered into her thoughts; she was quite unprepared for the effect her words produced upon his face. She could not look into his heart and see the feeling they created there. Quick as lightning the thought flashed upon his brain—"Does she think I am attracted here by her father's gold?—that through her beauty I would lay my hand upon his wealth? Ah, me! she sees too much; she has discovered the love I fancied I had well concealed. She thinks that I am presumptuous, mad; she is too kind to wound me, and by her pretty, playful words she seeks to cure my madness." For a second only he was silent; then he answered, looking her calmly in the face,—

"You ask me what effect gold has on my sex? Well, it is difficult to answer that question. It affects people differently; some it attracts, others it repels. I, on my part, should despise the man who made a woman's wealth the stepping-stone to fortune."

"And yet if he loved her, to what better use could her wealth be put?" said Margaret.

"What is that you are talking about?" said Lucy, at that moment rejoining them. "But I need not ask, I know you were discussing, in refined phrases, the propriety or impropriety of marrying for money."

"You certainly have a very plain way of putting it," remarked Paul Wynter.

"The plainest is always the easiest understood," replied Lucy. "I do not approve of marrying for money on either side."

"Why!" exclaimed Claude, for the first time joining in the conversation. "I do not think it matters who has got the dress, so that there is enough of it."

"I do not know," said Paul Wynter doubtfully. "I do not think any sensitive man would put himself in such a position that his honour could be suspected."

"How could he help it, if he fell in love with a woman who was rich?" inquired Margaret.

"He could stifle his affection before it grew too heavy for him to bear," replied Paul Wynter. "He could suffer and be still. The bare suspicion that he had sought a woman for her wealth, her position, for anything, indeed, but for love's own sake, would crush out the life of an honourable man."

"It is generally thought a good thing to be rich," said Margaret; "but your over-sensitive notions would make it an evil."

"Not at all; let the rich mate with the rich, the poor with the poor," replied Paul Wynter. "Why you, yourself, Miss Brookland, would be the first to despise a man you suspected of mercenary motives."

"Yes," exclaimed Margaret, getting excited, "I own it is most mean and contemptible to seek a woman because she is rich; but it is not noble to reject her for it. Because a woman has houses and lands, is she to live and die unloved? If so, her gold might well be melted down into her grave-stone, and laid upon her while she lives, crushing out of her warm heart its best and holiest feeling, beneath a weight of gilded misery—for that is what you make it."

"Why, my dear Margaret," exclaimed Lucy, who had rarely seen her so much excited and earnest, "we have been talking like sensible reflective beings, and you turn upon us like an accusing angel, and in a tragic attitude I declare!"

Margaret saw that she had taken matters too seriously, and said more than she intended. She had been bristling all over in a suit of mental armour, ready to turn a sham battle into a serious encounter; so she laughed with assumed carelessness, saying,—

"I detest all serious reflective people. But Lucy," she added, pausing in her walk, "we have been rambling along and chatting so pleasantly, that we have quite forgotten how time is flying, and how far we are from home! It will be quite dark before we get back; and papa will be waiting for his tea."

They all turned their steps homeward, and walked at a rapid pace towards Brooklands. Lucy and Margaret hurried on before. Presently their steps were arrested by a sharp cry from Claude,

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Lucy, running back and finding him leaning heavily on Paul Wynter's arms; even in the deepening twilight she saw he had turned pale, and his lips were compressed with pain.

"Nothing," he answered; "go on, Lucy, do not mind me. I was a fool to cry out; but when I walk fast or run, I have such a terrible sharp pain here;" he addressed Paul Wynter as he spoke the last few words.

"Do not hurry," he answered; "take your time; I will see the ladies home, and then return to you."

Accordingly he escorted the ladies home, and was soon back again. Meanwhile Claude had thrown himself beneath an old elm-tree; and Paul Wynter found him there, whistling an old song.

"I daresay you thought I was a muff for calling out," he said. "But I could not help it; the pain is so acute while it lasts, that it takes away my breath. But do not look glum, old fellow, it is nothing. Mr. Brookland swears he will cure me in a month. Look here!" As he spoke, he opened his vest and showed the galvanic chains bound round and round his body. "I have got the same round my arms and ankles," he added, laughing merrily; "and I feel like an alderman in chains just going to be roasted."

"I tell you candidly, Claude, I do not like these pains," said Paul Wynter gravely.

"No more do I. It is lucky they do not stay long. Come, I am game for a walk now. Will you have a cheroot?"

His offer was accepted, and the two walked on side by side, silently puffing away for a few minutes in silence.

Presently, after a few trifling observations, Claude burst into raptures about Margaret Brookland. It was such a relief to be able to talk about her; and he thought he might let his full heart flow over without fear of a rebuff from Paul Wynter, who proved, indeed, a most comfortable confidant. He listened with silent patience while the boy poured out the story of his wild, foolish passion. When he spoke, it was to confirm his admiration or echo his praises; for was not his own heart filled with the same great beauty? But he could not have spoken of her, or of her beauty, to the ears of any man.

"Poor lad!" he said, patting Claude kindly on the shoulder, as he paused in one of his wild flights of enthusiasm. "I am sorry you ever came to Brooklands."

"Sorry!—why sorry? This has been the happiest time of my life. It is a glorious privilege to be allowed to look at Miss Brookland, to walk and talk with her all day long, as I have done. Sometimes I—I feel as if I should fall down and worship her."

"It is fortunate you have done nothing so foolish," said Paul Wynter, gravely. "I do not know what would be the consequence if Miss Brookland knew of this—pardon me—I must call it folly!"

"She does know it," replied Claude. "I told her I adored her. I could not help it."

Paul Wynter could hardly believe his ears. His amazement was so great at the boldness of the boy, who had dared to utter—and to her—what he, Paul Wynter, would scarcely dare to *think* aloud; and he said, with astonishment in his tone,—

"You mean to say you have told Miss Brookland this that you have told to me?"

"Well, not exactly in the same words, of course; but she knows well enough that if my life were of any use to her, I would give it up freely as a pin. She laughs at me, but for all that she is letting me paint her picture; and it will gain me the prize. I know it will."

"All that is very well, Claude!" exclaimed Paul Wynter, impatiently. "Miss Brookland does not understand these things. Of course she laughs at you. But if Mr. Brookland came to know of your presumption—that is the right word, Claude—I must call it so—it would be a bad day for you and yours. You would take a speedy farewell of Brooklands."

"Why?" exclaimed Claude, excitedly. "You speak as though there was something in my love that would disgrace, degrade her! Why, the love of an honest man is a shame to no woman under the sun; and I have as good a right to love her as any man!" His face flushed crimson as he added, "It is true I am only a farmer's son, but what of that? There is no disgrace upon my name, no taint in my blood, and I know I have the power in me to make a name

which no man need blush to have created." He paused a moment, then added, "Do not think I have any radical dislike of those who are born above me—far from it. I own it is good to be well-born; but it is better to act nobly than be born great. Our birth is an accident which we owe to our parents; but our good deeds are our own. I feel that a day will come," he added, his face glowing with excitement, "perhaps when I shall have grown old and grey, when Margaret Brookland will look back to those dreamy days and say proudly, 'I knew him when he was a boy.'"

"My dear Claude," said Paul Wynter, laying his hand lightly on the boy's shoulder, "you have mistaken my meaning. I did not mean to hurt you, nor to cast the least reflection on you in any way—far from it. I freely own that your genius would win you an honourable place among the most honourable. But, Claude,"—his voice slightly faltered as he spoke—"I have been a little mad myself, and I fancied I saw a trace of the same poison in you."

They clasped hands silently and walked on. They understood one another better now.





CHAPTER XXVII.

STAINED YET STAINLESS.

“The honours of a name ’tis just to guard ;
They are a trust but lent us, which we take,
And should, in reverence to the donor’s fame,
With care transmit them down to other hands.”



ON the following Monday, Claude, accompanied by Paul Wynter, returned to town. Mr. Brookland invited him to renew his visit to Brooklands before the summer had quite departed.

“Although he hoped,” he said, “that they would meet in London before long, as he and Margaret would be spending a few weeks in town, and would not fail to pay a visit of inspection to his pleasant studio.”

Of course Claude said he would be more than delighted to receive them ; adding,—

“I hope I shall get my prize picture well on before that time. I mean to work at it day and night. My whole heart is in it. I feel as though it would exhaust all the strength and vigour of my thoughts ; I know I shall never undertake such a labour of love again.”

After many and profuse expressions of gratitude for the great kindness he had received at Brooklands, he took leave of them all. Paul Wynter’s farewell was for a shorter time, as he was to return on the following Saturday.

Claude kept his gaze fixed on the old hall until it was

hidden from his sight ; then his eyes clung with lingering looks to the tall green trees that enshrouded it. When at last they had passed the boundaries of Brooklands, and the whole manor had faded from his sight, he had worked himself up into such a state of agitation that he fairly burst into tears.

"I think I have got a fit of the blues coming on," he said apologetically, "but I feel—I really do—that I shall never look upon her living face again."

Paul Wynter was grave and kind, and treated the boy with a solemn, pitying tenderness that is sometimes seen among women, but is rarely to be found among men, especially in their conduct towards each other. Paul Wynter seemed to see further than the young artist's eyes or thoughts could reach. He accompanied him home to his lodgings, and talked to him long and seriously upon the necessity of leading a quiet regular life, with as little excitement as possible. He was so far uneasy about him that he paid him a daily visit.

"The fact is, your brain is too active, my dear boy—you give it no rest. You work too hard, and think too much ; and even when you lay aside your brush, instead of remaining quietly at home to rest, you rush out into the world, and plunge into all kinds of unhealthy excitement. I tell you candidly, Master Claude, this must not go on, or I will not answer for the consequences. Come, throw by your brush and easel, and go down home to Cornwall for six months' rest and quietness, and I will be satisfied."

"I should rather think you would," replied Claude laughing. "My dear old doctor, you are asking me to do what is simply impossible. I could no more leave off working and thinking than I could leave off breathing and live, especially just now. You know I am painting my prize picture?—it is the very counterpart of *her*. Her beauty brightens every hour beneath my touch. Sometimes I look at it—I stare at it, till I feel growing idiotic, and fancy I see a smile already dawning upon her lips. I dream of it, and get up in the middle of the night to give some touch that I fancy I have forgotten. I daresay you will laugh at me, but I assure you there are moments when the expression of the face seems to change without my help. It is so like

her, Wynter," he added earnestly, "that I almost believe I am creating another Margaret."

It was no use to talk to a creature of Claude Nutford's nervous temperament. He had no control over himself; he could not be idle—he could not be still. So, in a constant state of feverish excitement, he worked on, allowing himself scarce time to eat, drink, or sleep. Such a continual strain upon the nervous system would have told upon the strongest constitution; and silently and secretly it was telling upon him.

Meanwhile, whenever Paul Wynter could snatch a day from his prison duties, he appeared at Brooklands. He found no difficulty whatever in leaving the prison; his friend was always ready, though at great inconvenience to himself, to take his place. He had found great favour in the eyes of the governor, and the poor old prisoner, who was all Paul Wynter's care, was quite satisfied with Dr. Chapman's attendance. Indeed they had grown to be great friends. Animated by a generous, pitying spirit, the bluff old surgeon treated Paul Wynter's father with as much courteous deference as he would have used towards him if he had never fallen out of the ranks of honourable men.

Margaret Brookland began to look forward expectantly to the occasional visits of Paul Wynter, as a child looks forward to a bright holiday. She found more pleasure in his society than any other human being afforded her. She had learned to look up to him, and derived both pleasure and instruction from his conversation. Sometimes her thoughts wandered away into unknown regions, and were lost in a tangled maze of odd-sounding theories and conjectures; and he was always ready to come to her assistance, and clear a way for her through the forest of intellectual difficulties, till the path lay easy before her. When he left Brooklands her thoughts followed him out into the great world, whose pulse he quickened by his silent self-sacrificing deeds, and whose miseries he lessened by his daily life. Indeed, there seldom passed an hour that he was not in Margaret's thoughts, some slight thing was sure to remind her of him. She wondered what he would say, how he would act, even how he would look under this circumstance or under that, and always ended by feeling sure he would

say and do the very wisest thing that could be done or said ; he seemed so superior to everyone else. Ever since Margaret Griffiths had been at Brooklands, her feeling for him had deepened wonderfully. It had grown so subtly, and withal was so strong and so absorbing, that it seemed to incorporate within itself all that was most sweet and most sublime. Friendship was too cold a name for it ; love was perhaps too warm, too earthly. She seemed to have awakened to a new sense, to have found something more exquisite in the enjoyment of this life than she had ever known before.

She was never tired of hearing, and her young *protégée* was never tired of talking of Paul Wynter. She heard all, knew all of his outer life that the child could tell. It seemed so much at first, now it seemed so little ! She wanted to know more of him and his surroundings. That he was well-born, well-bred, and highly educated, she knew. She also knew that he had not always been obliged to toil for his bread as he was toiling now, but she knew no more. She began to wonder who he was?—had he a father?—mother?—brothers or sisters? She would like to know something of those whom he loved, or who loved him. She had grown so used to his coming to Brooklands, she never thought there could be a day when he would come no more.

Lucy was still at Brooklands ; Margaret could not part with her, and it must be acknowledged, she was by no means anxious to go. Her father had written many times to remind her not to outstay her welcome, and asked her to fix a day for her return. He wanted her at home ; but the weeks rolled on, and he received pretty little coaxing letters from Margaret and Lucy both, postponing her return from time to time. However, there was to be a ball at Brooklands shortly, and, immediately after that was over, it was decided that Lucy should return home to Cornwall.

Mr. Joel Craig and Paul Wynter both had received an invitation to the dancing-party. The former accepted with unfeigned pleasure. Though, he said, he was deeply engaged and hard-worked with his new gas company, yet he must steal a few days to run down and bask in the rich beauties of Brooklands. Paul Wynter came down, to

express in person his regret that he could not have the pleasure of joining in their festivities. Such gay scenes, he said, ill-suited him ; he felt out of place.

"The gay scene would be all the better for your company," replied Margaret. "I insist upon your coming ; and you know I am used to have my own way. If we cannot bring you here by force of tongue, we must by force of arms."

"I am afraid, then, I should be in a hopeless case. There would be no resisting that."

"Yes, do come, Mr. Wynter," urged Lucy. "Of course you do not dance, but then you can talk to amuse people."

"So can a parrot," he replied ; "and, indeed, his chatter might be as well suited to the occasion as mine." He did not like the idea of talking "to amuse people."

"I should like you to come, because I think you would enjoy yourself," said Margaret ; "and I should like you to see the old Hall decked out in all its ancient bravery. You have no idea how grand we look when the heirlooms of a thousand Brooklands are decorating the walls, speaking to our hearts instead of to our ears, reminding us with such mute eloquence of all they have done and won for us to enjoy. You know, on those occasions I wear the very jewels my great-grandmothers wore three hundred years ago ; and as I walk through the picture-gallery I hold an imaginary conversation with them sometimes, and show them the bracelets on my arm that are painted upon theirs ; and I fancy the dear quaint old things brighten up, and look quite pleased to be remembered."

"If the faces of the pictured dead could brighten, I am sure they would grow animated at the sight of so fair and venerating a descendant as yourself."

"How can I help venerating those who have left me an unstained, honourable inheritance ?" she answered. "How could I live in this dear old home, that has sheltered generations of Brooklands, and not feel grateful to those who have kept our blood pure, and our name stainless ?"

"What is in a name ?" says our grand old poet. And yet we all feel that there is a great deal more in a name than the mere sound of it," answered Paul Wynter. "Who would not be proud to have been born a Fitzalan, an Audley, a

Berkeley, or a Ferrers? For my part, I have a great reverence for the antiquity of family as well as of things, but I despise a spurious imitation. A great deal may be got, in this world, for money. A man may buy a pedigree, may honestly earn and proudly wear a title, but he cannot buy a drop of the good old blood that has flowed for generations through the veins of an ancient race, nor taste the savour of honour that clings to a roof like this. You may well—indeed, you ought to be proud of your home.”

“And I am proud,” replied Margaret, and gloriously grand and beautiful she looked as she spoke. “Proud that my birth is gentle, and my blood pure; proud that the breath of slander has never rested on the name of Brookland! I am sure, if my remotest ancestor had disgraced himself, I should never have forgiven him; and if he had been a traitor, I should blush for shame even now!”

Paul Wynter's spirit seemed to sink down and faint beneath the blaze of honourable pride that lighted up the depths of her soft grey eyes. He felt sick at heart—the shadow that darkened his whole life fell over him. A nameless terror crept into his mind, a dread lest she should ever know the disgrace that lay upon him. He felt he would rather die, ay, die self-slain, than live to see her proud, pure face darken and turn from him, with a natural shrinking away from a tainted life. How would she look? What would she think, what say, if she ever knew she had shaken hands, walked side by side, and lived in the sweet social intimacy of daily life with the son of a convict, who was now working in labour gangs at stonebreaking in a prison yard? He shivered slightly, and made an impulsive attempt to hide his hands, as though the reflection of his father's gyves were upon his own wrists.

He could not continue the conversation, he was like one suddenly struck dumb. For once he had not a word to say in answer to Margaret. Lucy had sauntered away to fetch her sketching materials, and her return brought with it fresh matter for conversation. Paul Wynter was unusually grave during the rest of the day. He avoided as much as possible the society of the ladies, and rambled over the farming part of the establishment with Mr. Brookland, and advanced him-

self greatly in his esteem by exhibiting a profound knowledge of short-horns and Alderneys.

Mrs. Creamly dined at Brooklands, where she was to remain on a visit for a few days. Her husband having gone to London on business connected with the bank, she had managed to get invited to Brooklands during his absence. The dinner hour passed pleasantly enough, as it always does when the host is genial, and the hostess exerts herself to be agreeable.

The ladies retired to the drawing-room, whither the gentlemen soon followed them. Margaret dispensed the tea bountifully among her friends, and then declared she had finished her duties, and meant to be amused. She arranged the chess-board, saying,—

“I suppose, papa, you and Mrs. Creamly, as usual, are going to have a battle royal over the chess-board? So, Mr. Wynter, you, I, and Lucy must amuse ourselves. Come, you shall either read to us, talk, or tell us a story. There will be no ramble for us this evening. See, a drizzling rain is already beginning to fall.”

She buried herself cosily among the soft sofa cushions, and Lucy took up some make-believe ladies' work—knitting of some kind, that would employ her fingers, and let her thoughts go free. Margaret confessedly hated work, and rarely professed to do any. Mr. Brookland and Mrs. Creamly sat at one end of the room, with knitted brows and watchful eyes, slowly progressing with their scientific game, sometimes pausing nearly ten minutes between their moves, and looking as absorbed and anxious as though their fate was depending upon the game. The two girls were listening with sympathetic interest to the story Paul Wynter was telling, and which he had partially modelled on his own.

The rain was still falling, pattering upon the laurel and ivy leaves without. There was no moon, no stars to be seen; the leaden clouds rolled invisibly overhead, discharging their heavy showers, and passing away. They were all pleasantly occupied, seated there in the sweet security of home, unconscious that a dark face, with eyes blazing with anger, rage, and wonder, was glaring in upon them.

Mr. Joel Craig had come down unexpectedly to Brooklands, to make some fresh proposal and arrangement re-

specting the gas company. Indeed, he wanted a further advance of money, and came down to explain matters; he could do so better by word of mouth than he could have written it. He knew the domestic arrangements of Brooklands well, and thought he would walk in unannounced, and surprise them all. Passing the drawing-room window, he paused a moment, and heard Paul Wynter's voice narrating his story to the listening girls. A strange feeling, full of rage and bitterness, rushed to his heart. He crept nearer, he could hardly believe his ears, and he wanted to make sure with his eyes that his ears had not deceived him. He crept as near to the window as he possibly could—too near, for as he lifted aside the heavy boughs to get a better view of the room, his hurried movement, or the unnatural agitation of the branches, attracted Lucy's attention. She sprang to the window, and peered out into the darkness.

"What is it, Lucy?—how you startle one!" exclaimed Margaret.

"I fancied I heard some one moving just outside the window," replied Lucy.

"Impossible; unless perhaps one of the dogs may have wandered through the shrubbery," replied Margaret. "Here, Grim! Grim!" she added, calling aloud, well knowing that the sound of her voice would bring any of the dogs bouncing into the room. But her call was unanswered, and Lucy returned to her seat.

"You interrupted the story at the most interesting point," said Margaret. "Pray go on, Mr. Wynter."

When Lucy looked out, Joel Craig held his breath, and crouched down among the laurels beneath her feet. He would not be caught eavesdropping; and of all men in the world, the one he most wished to avoid was Paul Wynter. When all was quiet, and the voice of the story-teller took up the thread of the narrative where Lucy had broken it off, he again crept stealthily forward. He dared not venture near enough to the window to get a full view of the room. He caught a side glance of Margaret Brookland's face. Then his eye lighted upon Paul Wynter's shadow, that fell full upon the wall beside her. Seeing that, he had seen enough. Slowly and cautiously he left his hiding-place. If any one could have seen his face at that moment, they would scarcely

have recognised the features of the handsome, dashing Joel Craig ; for its expression rivalled the blackness of the night that surrounded him. There seemed to be an evil fate continually rising up against him, and trying to overcome the good fortune he had found at Brooklands. He had been compelled to face Lucy Nutford, when he would rather have avoided her ; but she was a woman, and he could turn her which way he pleased.

With Paul Wynter it was different. Matters with him required another kind of treatment. He would not, he dared not meet him there. Envy, hatred, and malice were working in his heart, and silent curses trembled on his lips. He wandered for awhile out among the grand old trees, and beneath their dripping branches communed with himself, debating what course of action to take. He was not long arriving at a decision. Then, and not till then, he mustered his courage, and boldly entered Brooklands. Mr. Brookland had just check-mated Mrs. Creamly, and was beaming radiantly upon the occasion. When the footman brought him a note, which he endeavoured to hand to him unnoticed, and of course failed, Mr. Brookland glanced his eye over it. There were but a few lines, hastily written. As he read them, he looked slightly puzzled for a moment ; then got up from his seat, and slowly left the room. He went direct to his study, where Mr. Joel Craig awaited him. Mr. Brookland greeted him warmly,—

“Why, Craig, my dear fellow, I am delighted to see you. But why make this mystery about your arrival ? Why not join us in the drawing-room at once ? Your travelling costume shall be excused, I promise you.”

“Because I would rather not. I want to say a few words to you in private,” replied Joel Craig.

“Oh ! I know. But those affairs can wait till the morning. I always get the indigestion if I transact business at night,” returned Mr. Brookland. “Come, we are all alone.”

“Alone ! I thought you had company.”

“Oh ! no ! only your great admirer, Mrs. Creamly, and a very esteemed friend of mine, Mr. Wynter, whom I shall be very happy to introduce to you.”

"Wynter!" repeated Mr. Craig. "So he calls himself Wynter, does he?"

"Of course he does," replied Mr. Brookland, his curiosity gradually roused by Mr. Craig's manner as much as by his words. "Why, his name is Wynter, is it not?"

Instead of answering, Mr. Craig, with folded arms, paced up and down the room with a thoughtful, perplexed countenance. Mr. Brookland's eyes followed his movement in some surprise. Finding he received no reply, he added, somewhat impatiently,—

"I wish you would say straight out what you mean. You seem to think there is something wrong about my friend Wynter, and yet you have not seen him."

"I have seen him," replied Mr. Craig, pausing suddenly, and laying his hand on Mr. Brookland's shoulder. "At least, I have seen his shadow reflected on your wall, partly falling over and shading Miss Brookland's fair face. There could be no mistaking either the one or the other. God forgive me if I am wrong!"

He uttered the last few words painfully and below his breath; but not so low that Mr. Brookland could not hear them. And now thoroughly excited, he exclaimed,—

"You perplex and bewilder me with these ominous half phrases, that say nothing, yet seem to mean so much. If there is anything connected with Mr. Wynter that I ought to know, tell me at once. Remember, I do not want to pry into Mr. Wynter's private concerns, but if there is anything touching his honour as a gentleman, which renders his acquaintance in any way discreditable to me or—to my daughter, I ought to know it; more for her sake than my own, for she is motherless. Now, come, sit down and speak out."

Joel Craig drew a chair towards him and sat down. It was easy enough to comply with Mr. Brookland's desire so far; but the "speaking out" was a more difficult matter.

"I really do not know what to say," he replied, speaking with slow deliberation; "indeed if it were not for Miss Brookland's sake, I do not think I should speak at all. He was my friend once—I have a kindly feeling for him still—but I cannot, out of any sentimental feeling for him, see you deceived, especially when I do not know how the deception

will end, or for what purpose it is practised ; for when a man enters a house under a false name, it can be for no good object."

"A false name!" repeated Mr. Brookland, with a vehemence that was so unnatural to him, it quite startled Mr. Craig. "Do you mean to say that I have received under my roof, and into the bosom of my family, a man who is masquerading under a false name?" Joel Craig looked affirmatively, but did not speak ; and Mr. Brookland added, as having a private understanding with himself, "A false name is only put on when a man has disgraced, and must lay aside his true one. Mr. Wynter's thoughts, his sentiments, his actions, have always been those of an honourable gentleman. I *cannot* believe him to be a hypocrite, or worse, much worse, if what you say is true. There has always seemed to be a mystery about him—I thought it was sorrow, *you* tell me it is crime!—and he is now sitting side by side, face to face, with my stainless child!"

He was rushing from the room, when Joel Craig once more laid his hand upon his shoulder, and arrested his steps, saying,—

"Crime! your imagination is too free—I never said crime. There are some few facts connected with his history that I think you ought to know. I, well knowing this, should consider myself guilty of a breach of social honour, if I withheld them from you."

"Well, well! what are they?" exclaimed Mr. Brookland.

"I have changed my mind," replied Joel Craig. "I shall say nothing against him. It is enough for me to say that he is here under a false name. I may *guess* his object, but I do not *know* it, and I have no right to hint my suspicion to you. I—I grieve deeply to be compelled to speak so far ; but my regard for you and for Miss Brookland will not allow me to be silent."

"But is there really no chance of your being mistaken or being deceived, or deceiving yourself?" said Mr. Brookland. "I do not like to think badly of a man I have so respected. I should like you to see Mr. Wynter, in order to make sure he is the man you take him for."

"I do not wish you to take my word," replied Joel Craig ; "ask him, and learn the truth from his own lips. The fact

is, Mr. Brookland," he added confidentially, "I am in a way unpleasantly connected with the past of this gentleman whom you call Wynter. In the interests of law and justice, I have been compelled to go against him and his, and in consequence he thinks I am his enemy, and is greatly embittered against me. For that reason I do not wish to meet him. Our meeting would do no good to either of us; and for that reason also you shall learn nothing further concerning him from me. I merely tell you a fact, the truth of which you may learn from his own lips. One thing only I ask you, make no mention of *my* name to him. I have not mentioned *his* to you." He grasped Mr. Brookland's hand warmly as he added, "I owe you a debt of gratitude, Mr. Brookland, and I am trying to pay it now."





CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BURIED NAME.

“Though the rock of my last hope is shivered,
And its fragments are sunk in the wave,
Though I feel that my soul is delivered
To pain, it shall not be its slave.

“There is many a pang to pursue me—
They may crush, but they shall not contemn ;
They may torture, but shall not subdue me—
‘Tis of thee that I think, not of them.”



R. BROOKLAND re-entered the drawing-room about half an hour after he had left it, and found them all in the same position. Mrs. Creamly had not stirred from her seat ; but had taken up a book which she was pretending to read, though her eyes and her ears too were engaged in watching and listening to the group on the other side of the room. Paul Wynter had finished his story, and the girls, each in her own fashion, half in jest, half in earnest, were commenting upon it, when Mr. Brookland touched Paul Wynter on the shoulder, and said significantly,—

“Will you favour me with your company for five minutes ?”

“Certainly,” replied Paul, rising with alacrity.

The moment Margaret looked in her father’s face, she saw that he was unusually disturbed and excited. What could it mean ? and what could he have to say to Mr. Wynter ? She was curious to know. She, too, rose from her seat, and said impulsively—

"May I go with you, papa?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then said,—

"If you like, Margaret, certainly—perhaps it would be as well you should be present."

"I think it will be a great deal better," she answered, fancying for the moment that he was going to consult Paul Wynter upon some literary matter. "You have no idea how wise I am. I am quite sure, if a woman were admitted into every masculine consultation, there would not be half the blundering there is."

Finding that her father still looked perplexed and disturbed, Margaret lifted her eyes anxiously to his face, and nestling closer to his side, said nervously—

"Have you had any return of your old pain, papa?"

Her father had sometimes consulted Paul Wynter, and she thought he might be going to consult him now.

"No, my child—no, it is quite a new pain," he answered, as they entered the study, and he closed the door behind them. He made no preamble, no introduction to his words, but turning straight round on Paul Wynter, flashed out his question—"How long have you borne the name of Wynter? Is it a true or a false one?"

Paul Wynter staggered as though he had received a violent blow; the blood rushed in a strong red tide to his face, then slowly ebbed, and left him with a white stricken look, that went to Mr. Brookland's heart, and, in spite of his indignation for the moment, he softened towards him, as he answered, with tremulous lips—

"That blow was well aimed; it has struck home, and falling from your lips, it has stunned the better part of me. I—I shall recover soon."

He sighed heavily as he spoke, and leaned his head upon his hand in an attitude of deep dejection, and seemed to be rallying his nerves, struggling for courage to say all that must be said now.

"I am afraid I have spoken too abruptly," said Mr. Brookland gently. "My question seems to have agitated you more than I had anticipated. Pray do not hurry to answer it."

"It must have been answered some day—why not now?" replied Paul, speaking with a strange calm, that seemed

almost unnatural, considering the circumstances that surrounded him. After a moment's pause he added—"I know some enemy has set you on the track of my life's misery, and I own I would rather have forestalled his malice, and told the tale myself. You should have learnt the worst from my own lips."

"Oh! papa," exclaimed Margaret, interrupting him, and dreading she knew not what, "if there is any worst to be told, do not hear it!" Addressing Paul Wynter, she added—"If there is anything to be confessed, and you are guilty, do not speak of it—be silent and go! You seemed so good, so noble, and true, I could not bear to see you degraded and ashamed."

She spoke with a voice of tears, though her eyes were dry and bright. The grief and pathos of her tone gave strength and power to Paul's spirit, and kindled a light in his eyes that contrasted strongly with the expression of his face a moment before.

"Ashamed I may be," he explained, "but, thank heaven! the shame is not *mine*, though I bear the bitter burthen of it. No; my hands are clean, or I should not dare to offer this to you."

He stretched his hand towards her as he spoke, and impulsively she placed her own within it. Mr. Brookland observed them both, and the suspicion Joel Craig had insinuated now rose palpably in his mind. He snatched Margaret's hand away, saying angrily,—

"Enough of this folly! I have but few more words to say. I recall the welcome I gave you, and request you to leave my house at once. I wonder you have dared to enter it!"

"It was at your request I did so," replied Paul. "I never sought to thrust myself upon your notice—do me so much justice, at least."

"No matter—no matter," said Mr. Brookland testily. "You have taken fraudulent possession of my esteem, won my regard under false pretences; for it was under a false name you entered my house—you cannot deny that."

He was getting excited, and doubly irritated at the air of "guilty, yet not guilty," that sat on Paul Wynter's face after the first flush of shame had passed away.

"I shall not attempt to deny it," he answered; "but if you will hear me, I can, perhaps, give you reasons."

"Ay, ay! a rogue's reasons," interrupted Mr. Brookland impatiently; "he is a young sinner who can give no reasons for his sin."

"At least let him speak, papa," exclaimed Margaret, looking beseechingly into her father's face. "I must hear what he has to say. We have been such friends—he has been so kind, we cannot part without some explanation. He says his hands are clean—why may not his conscience be clean also? A false name need not of necessity hide a false heart."

"Child," said Mr. Brookland, "it is never used to hide a true one. You have heard him confess with his own lips that he is not what he seems to be."

"Yes," replied Margaret, "but he may be something better than he seems." She turned to Paul with a flash of impatient indignation, saying, "Why don't you speak? Say something to put an end to this terrible uncertainty! You must see that my father suspects you of something—I do not know what, though I do not believe you are guilty. Why do you not speak out boldly, and deny it?"

Paul Wynter did speak, but neither to admit nor to deny his suspected guilt. Her ingenuous defence, her brave belief in him, in spite of appearances, when the tide seemed to have set so strong against him, affected him deeply; and for a moment his emotional feelings hindered his powers of speech. At last he said, addressing Margaret, instead of answering her father,—

"I have always known that such an hour as this must come, and have dreaded it, and shrank from it; and if I had been strong enough, I would have flown to the end of the world to avoid it, as a time when the crowning shame, and sorrow of my whole life, must be made evident to your eyes. But you have taken the sting from the shame, and made the sorrow lighter. I am no longer ashamed, for, when you know all, I feel you will be a merciful judge. You will give me the pure justice of God rather than the cold judgment of man."

"You need not trouble yourself to give any further explanation," exclaimed Mr. Brookland angrily. "I have heard enough."

"No, no, papa!" exclaimed Margaret, interrupting him eagerly, "we have not heard enough. We ought to know all, or we had better have heard nothing; for my sake you must hear what he has to say."

"For your sake!" repeated Mr. Brookland, roused to a pitch of angry excitement she had never witnessed in him before, and for which he could ill account now. "What is it to you whether this man is a thief and swindler or not? I am ashamed of you; it is indecent and unwomanly to thrust yourself between me and a stranger, who has introduced himself to you, and to me, under a false name! That fact alone is damaging to the respectability of any man."

Margaret was bewildered and ashamed. "Indecent and unwomanly!" Was that true? They were the first harsh words that had ever fallen from her father's lips, at least to her. What had she done? What had she said to deserve them now? She lifted her eyes to his face—its darkening expression of anger frightened her, and she said in a low voice,—

"I do not wish to thrust myself between you and Mr. Wynter, but I feel—I think—Oh! papa!" she added, as the tears burst from her eyes, "he has been our guest—our companion—has broken our bread, slept beneath our roof, and it will be something to me, and to you too, if he proves a dishonourable man. When you are calm, you are generous and just—you would listen patiently to the extenuation, even of the sins of your enemy. If you should misjudge your friend, even by a shade of injustice, you would never forgive yourself."

Mr. Brookland's face softened as his daughter spoke. He felt the truth of her words, though he would rather they had been unspoken. He regretted bitterly that he had allowed her to be present at this most unpleasant interview; but he gave permission—ungraciously enough, it must be owned—to Paul Wynter to say what he could in explanation or vindication of himself. As for Paul, he was in no hurry to speak; he would have been content to stand silently by and listen to harsher words or graver accusations, since they raised up for him so brave a defender. The pathos of her sweet voice, and the mute

sympathy of her humid eyes, thrilled through every sense, and sent a gleam of joy flashing through the degradation and darkness that seemed to be closing round him. Seeing that he was still silent, Mr. Brookland reminded him that he was willing to hear whatever he had got to say, and begged him to speak briefly, so that their interview might be soon ended. Paul Wynter spoke then.

"My story is a melancholy one. I hardly know how to begin it, or in what words to tell it."

"Let them be honest words, at least," said Mr. Brookland, with special emphasis.

"They shall," replied Paul, flushing to the brows. "I have already said the sin that lies so heavily upon me is not mine."

"There are few men who are generous enough to bear the sins of another," said Mr. Brookland.

"And yet from the time of the creation it has been so. The child has suffered for the father's sin, and I am suffering for mine."

He groaned aloud, and covered his eyes, as the image of his father, with his white hairs, breaking stones in the prison-yard, rose up before him. But the ice was broken now; there was no going back, he must go on to the end. Sorrow, and pity, and shame for his father's crime were working strongly in his spirit, and seemed to be oozing through his flesh, for great beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. With as much control over himself as he could assume, he told the story without preamble or extenuation, exactly as it had reached the public ear so many months before. He did not repeat the statement which his father had made to him so solemnly in the prison, as that did not materially alter facts. As he proceeded, a gleam of remembrance of the published facts dawned slowly upon Mr. Brookland's mind.

"Ay; ay!" he said, "I remember all the circumstances quite well, and I am heartily sorry for you; but your father's crime is no excuse for yours."

"For mine?"

"Yes, yours; for it is a social crime to introduce yourself into a man's house under a false name."

"Ah! I see," said Paul, with a heavy sigh. "But,

believe me, it was not in your house only that I bore it, but in the face of the whole world. I know—I shall never know another. I could not bear a name which branded me as a felon's son. I have given up all I possessed, even the fortune I inherited from my dead mother. I have replaced the broken trust, and have left the remainder of her property to my father's creditors. I kept nothing that was mine, nothing that was his, not even his name. I threw that off as a stained, dishonoured rag, and took the name of Wynter—it was my mother's—which I now bear. I am sorry if you condemn me, but still, in that respect, I cannot regret what I have done. That which is wrong in a general way, may in some particular case be right. I have no more to say. I have answered you."

Although Paul spoke to Mr. Brookland, his eyes were fixed on Margaret.

"And you have answered well," she said, with glowing cheeks. "Thank God! you are as good and noble as I thought you. If I had a brother—if you had a son, papa," she added, throwing her arms round her father's neck, "you would have had him act exactly as Mr. Wynter has done."

"I must own, Mr. Wynter," said Mr. Brookland, addressing him frankly, "you have extricated yourself from your unpleasant position more satisfactorily than I expected. With all my heart I sympathise with you, but the result must be the same—all intimacy between us must end here; for though you have no part in your father's sin, you must bear a portion of his shame."

"I deny it!" exclaimed Paul, the pride of his whole race, that had been so long stifled and trodden down, flashing into his face. "Shame must be self-made; it is no inheritance."

"That may be your opinion, but it is not mine," replied Mr. Brookland—"it is not the world's. You have all to gain, nothing to lose. I have the honour of my house and my daughter's good name to care for. I—I am sorry if I speak harshly, Mr. Wynter, but our intimacy must end here. If you are as blameless as you seem to be, I am sorry for you."

"If I were guilty I should be sorry for myself," replied Paul. "I must own," he added, smiling bitterly, "you give

me a poor allowance of mercy. You punish my misfortune as though it were my crime."

"The crime of one man clings to his whole race," said Mr. Brookland, "and follows it from generation to generation. It is a moral plague spot, that cannot be washed out, cannot be concealed. Is there a man or woman either who would not blush to be the descendant of a felon?"

"No man can choose his own ancestors, or answer for their sins," said Paul. "But no matter—there is a just God over all; if I had not faith in Him I should not have lived till now. I cannot plead for your friendship, Mr. Brookland, though God alone knows how I grieve to lose it!"

Sympathy and compassion were knocking loudly at Mr. Brookland's heart; but there was something in the look of Margaret's eyes that told him he must be strong in his resolution to end all intimacy with Paul Wynter at once. His very love, his fears for her, made him hard, cruel, and obdurate to him.

"It is no use prolonging this painful interview," he said. "I feel for you Mr. Wynter, more, perhaps, than you will believe, or I can express; and wherever you go, you will carry with you my warm wishes and my best esteem. I shall always be glad to do you any service that lies in my power; but so far as we are personally concerned, all familiar intercourse between us must cease. I can no longer receive you as my guest, nor present you to my friends as—as—indeed, I should be committing a breach of social honour to them, and do you no real good; we should both be in a false position. I am sure you must see the justice of what I say."

"Well—yes—I suppose it is right," said Paul, a deep passionless despair darkening his eyes, and crushing all the music out of his voice. "I will not blame you, but you cannot be surprised if my soul rebels against the cruelty that crushes it. I have never felt the full curse of my father's crime till now that I am driven from your door."

"I cannot help it," replied Mr. Brookland with an uncompromising spirit. "I have the world to consider. I am compelled to act as I do for my own honour, and for my daughter's sake."

"No, no, Sir, not for my sake!" exclaimed Margaret. "Do not say it is for my sake you are ungenerous and cruel—for it is cruel!—to shut your doors, when you should open your heart to a man so bitterly afflicted. Mr. Wynter has suffered so undeservedly, and has borne it all so bravely. Think, Sir, only think how terrible it must be to blush for one's own father!—to have one's whole life anchored in a red sea of shame!"

Margaret did not see that her words were irritating, and adding fuel to the flame of her father's anger. Like most quiet, easy-going people, Mr. Brookland was not often roused; but when passion did get the mastery over him, he became its very slave, and said such cruel bitter things as in his calmer moments he would have shrank from even thinking. He did so now, but his words fell harmless upon Paul's ear; he was deaf and blind to everything but the magic of Margaret's voice and the subtle power of her beauty.

A few wild eloquent words, such as are not often uttered in a lifetime, broke from his lips. He thanked her, he blessed her, for her brave defence of him, who was defenceless. Even before her father's lowering face, he poured out the fullness of his gratitude. "Think of me sometimes," he added; "and, if you can, forget that I am a felon's son."

When the stormy interview was over, he left Brooklands. As it was already late in the evening, Mr. Brookland, whose conscience was ill at ease, wished him to remain until the morning, especially as the night was threatening, and he would not be able to get accommodation within three miles of the house; but Paul Wynter declined.

"I could not be an unwelcome guest in the house of any man, even for an hour," he said.

Margaret gave him her hand, and said, with less excitement than had hitherto marked her manner,—

"Good-bye, Mr. Wynter; and remember, whatever happens, I shall think well of you always." But when he left her father's roof, her sympathetic spirit seemed to follow him out into the dark night, where he would be alone with his great grief, and his life, like the night, would be unbrightened by a single star.



CHAPTER XXIX.

A DISMISSAL.

“What ! gone without a word ?
Ah, so true love should do ; it cannot speak ;
For truth hath better deeds than words to grace it.”

PAUL WYNTER did not leave the house by the grand entrance, but passed out by a side door, where he thought he would be less likely to attract the observation of any portion of the household. He was sorely sick at heart, and was not inclined to exchange words, or enter even into momentary companionship with anyone. He wanted to be alone with his own thoughts, that he might arrange and gather them together ; for at present they were strangely confused, and jangled inharmoniously one against another, like the thoughts of a man in a dream. As he wandered round the house, scarce controlling his footsteps, or heeding whither they led him, he found himself passing close by the fernery at the eastern side of the house. Glancing up, though the night was gloomy and dark, he fancied he saw a female figure standing at the open door. His heart beat quickly ; he hurried nearer, and as he did so, a sharp exclamation, “Who is that ?” fell upon his ear. He recognised Lucy’s voice, and answered,—

“It is I—Paul Wynter.”

“Good gracious, Mr. Wynter !” she answered, “what on earth are you doing, wandering about the place this time of

night, in such a ghostly fashion? I thought you were enjoying some mysterious interview with Mr. Brookland and Margaret in the study. I got tired of Mrs. Creamly," she added in a low voice, "and came out here to see what sort of a night it was. But come in, do."

"No," he answered, "I am leaving Brooklands. I can only shake hands with you, and say good-bye."

"Going away! why, how very sudden!"

"Yes, it is sudden." He crushed the words that were rising to his lips, and shook Lucy warmly by the hand, adding, "God bless you, Miss Nutford, and good-bye! I have come here too often, and remained too long."

"Do not say that," she answered, supposing he was acting under the influence of some momentary passion. "We shall all miss you terribly. I wish you could have stayed until to-morrow."

"Why until to-morrow?" some sudden impulse led him to inquire.

"Oh! because Mr. Craig is expected at Brooklands, and you ought to know one another."

"Craig!" echoed Paul, in a voice of utter bewilderment. It was so long since he had heard that name, and hearing it now from Lucy's lips, and at such a time, struck him with double wonder. "Craig!" he repeated—"what Mr. Craig?"

"Mr. Joel Craig," she said, impatiently. "Surely you must have heard us speak of him. He is a great friend of Mr. Brookland's and of Margaret's too."

"Of Margaret's, too!" repeated Paul. And the fine stalwart figure, dashing manners, and handsome face of Joel Craig crossed his mind. "God shield her from such an enemy!" he would have said, for so ran his thoughts. But after a moment's pause, he continued, "Miss Nutford, I know that man—I must speak to you; and you—if you care for Margaret—must put Mr. Brookland on his guard, and —"

"Hush!" exclaimed Lucy, glancing cautiously round, for she heard Mrs. Creamly's voice, and the fussy rustling of her skirts as she came towards the fernery. "I will come out and hear whatever you have to say."

As she spoke she came out, closing the door softly

behind her, and accompanied him across the lawn and into the shrubbery, where she fancied they would both be unseen and unheard. But she was mistaken. Mrs. Creamly caught sight of her light dress fluttering among the dark green trees. She saw, too, a dark figure by her side, but she did not recognise it as Paul Wynter's. A gleam of satisfaction crossed Mrs. Creamly's face, as she gently shot the bolt from the staple, muttering to herself,—

"She may go out unseen, but she shall not come back unnoticed. I knew no good could ever come of her."

Mrs. Creamly returned to the drawing-room in triumphant good-humour, drew the delicately-shaded lamp towards her, ensconced herself in a soft, velvet-cushioned chair, and took up a book, in which she seemed to be deeply interested, when, half-an-hour afterwards, Margaret entered the room, looking perhaps a trifle paler and more languid than usual, but that was all. She glanced round the room in search of Lucy, and at once missed her.

"Where is Lucy?" she inquired.

Now, Mrs. Creamly was proud of her probity and her truthfulness. She would not have told a direct lie; but she coquetted with the truth, played with it, tortured and twisted it about till it was unrecognisable, and so battered and defaced by her soft lips, that a downright falsehood would have seemed the most honest thing to utter. A lie is always a lie, and in the end can always be proved to be one; but a damaged and distorted truth will generally mislead or confuse the wariest nature. Mrs. Creamly looked up, and answered Margaret in her sweetest tone—

"Really, my dear, I cannot exactly say. I have been sitting here reading for some time. I had fancied you two were together."

"No. But I daresay she was tired of waiting, and has gone to bed. I think I shall follow her example, for I am very tired. Good-night."

She took up her candle and left the room, but presently returned, in some consternation.

"She is not in her room, Mrs. Creamly; and I cannot find her anywhere about the house!"

"Humph!—very strange, my dear. Perhaps she is taking an evening ramble in the park."

"Absurd! What! rambling on such a night as this! Why, it is raining fast!" said Margaret.

"Well, my dear child," said Mrs. Creamly, "if she is not to be found in the house, she must be wandering out of it, that is very clear, raining or not raining. You know, dear, I never quite approved of the association; and I should not be at all surprised if we were all murdered in our beds some day."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Margaret, turning away with more impatience than she generally used towards Mrs. Creamly. She inquired of the servants, "Had they seen Miss Nutford?" "No, not since the tea had been taken away." Margaret, sorely perplexed, went into her father's study, and there, to her surprise, found him in deep conversation with Joel Craig, of whose arrival at Brooklands she was ignorant. She told them how matters stood; that she had been looking for Lucy, and could not find her anywhere.

As they were talking, wondering, and roaming over the place in search of her, they heard a light tap-tapping at one of the side glass-doors. They all flocked together to open it, Mrs. Creamly among the number. Mr. Brookland stepped forward himself and threw the door wide open. Lucy was standing outside, shivering with cold and dripping with rain, and as she stepped over the threshold she looked pale, nervous, and uncomfortable at being discovered in such a plight. She glanced round with a half defiant, half impatient look, and uttered some few disconnected words of apology, adding,—

"I am sorry to have made all this commotion, but I have been bidding Mr. Wynter good-bye."

"Both he and you have chosen a strange time and a strange place for your parting scene, Miss Nutford," replied Mr. Brookland, with a grave displeasure, that contrasted so strongly with his usual cordial manner, that it brought the tears into Lucy's eyes. Margaret felt for her friend's embarrassment, and did all she could to shield her from curious observation, especially from Mrs. Creamly's.

"Come up to your room and take off your wet things," she said, "or you will get your death."

So saying, she hurried her up the stairs to her room, and

began to relieve her of her damp clothes, without a word of inquiry or remark. Lucy threw her arms round her neck, exclaiming,—

“You are the best and dearest friend in all the world, Margaret! But are you not going to ask me where I have been, and why I went out on such a night as this?”

“No,” replied Margaret, “I am not going to ask you anything; because, if you wish me to know, you will tell me without asking.”

“But, Margaret dear, suppose I own frankly that I would rather you did not know?”

“Well, then, I will try and not wonder what there can be between you and Mr. Wynter that I ought not to know.”

“It is not about either of ourselves,” replied Lucy, hastily, “or I would tell you with all my heart. It is the secret of another person, dear, whom Mr. Wynter entirely misunderstands and wrongfully suspects. That is all I feel myself at liberty to tell you, Margaret.”

“And it is quite enough; I do not wish to know any more,” said Margaret. “I am quite content to trust you. I daresay we have all some little private matters that we would not have exposed, even to our best friends. And what is friendship worth if we cannot trust one another, just a little, when trust is most needed? So many things go wrong in this world for want of a little trust, a little faith, a little charity!” she paused a moment, then added—“I am sorry Mr. Wynter has left us. Did he tell you why he went away? Did he say anything about himself?”

“No,” replied Lucy. “At least, nothing worth mentioning. But I think he seemed grieved to go.”

Though neither was inclined to talk, yet they made some miserable attempts to create some pleasant conversation, but failed. The usual girlish gossip had no interest for them that evening. The minds of both were perplexed with such subjects as they could not discuss with each other. Margaret’s mind was full of Paul Wynter’s strange, sad story—of sympathy with, and grief for him; but she must keep it all to herself. She felt it would be a breach of confidence to speak of his affairs even to Lucy, though it would have been a great relief to have spoken: but as he had said nothing to her of the circumstance of his leaving

Brooklands, she too, must be silent. They separated earlier than usual, and the early hours of the morning were fast approaching when, at last, they retired to rest.

Paul Wynter had spoken to Lucy of Mr. Craig. He brought no positive accusation against him. He could not speak out quite plainly, without unfolding the history of his father's disgrace, which he did not choose to communicate to Miss Nutford. He, however, cautioned her, and begged her to keep a strict watch over him, for Mr. Brookland's and for Margaret's sake, who both loved and trusted her. His impressive manner, and the sort of knowledge he seemed to have of Mr. Craig's general character, filled her with vague apprehensions; and though she took the part of the absent man, and accused Paul of malice, in throwing, or striving to throw, a cloud over him, yet her heart ached with an inward pain, and she went to her bed sad and sorrowful, as though some coming evil lay fore-shadowed upon her pillow.





CHAPTER XXX.

ALONE AGAIN.

“Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour,
To think of things that are well out-worn?
Of fruitless husk and fugitive flower,
The dream foredone and the deed forborne?
Though joy be done with, and grief be vain,
Time shall not sever us wholly in twain;
Earth is not spoiled by a single shower,
But the rain has ruined the ungrown corn.”



HERE in this wide world is there so much loneliness and desolation as in this great overgrown metropolis, London? A man of sorrow may wander side by side with his great grief, amid the babble and bustle of the world, and yet be utterly alone. He may hear rippling laughter mingling with the beggar's whine, and the sound of many feet for ever hurrying to and fro, never weary, never still. Yet he may be as utterly alone as though he lay shrouded and still in the grave.

The great heart of humanity seems beating with a strong grand pulse, sending forth a rich tide of life, that rolls and rushes onward, and laughs in the face of misery and despair; sometimes winning a smile from the weary, or throwing a momentary forgetfulness over the heart that is sad. In contemplating the grand scheme of life, in all its varied phases, revolving round us, we may be inclined to set down our own burthen, and rest awhile from sorrow, and watch the crowds of men and women who hurry by us, each bear-

ing his own burthen, invisible, indeed, yet written in legible lines on every face. We recognise the symbol of kindred joys or sorrows ; but it is written in an unknown cipher, of which God himself holds the key. No man can read aright the history of another's life, with its varied weights of trials and triumphs. A small part of it may be written in his actions, or painted by his own words ; but the greater, often the better part of it, is unwritten and unknown.

Some men like to wander away into solitary places, and let their troubles float away slowly and silently down the stream of time ; others will rush out into the full stream of life, and look the world boldly in the face, and, in the midst of its ceaseless roar and bustle, drown the sound of their own grief.

When Paul Wynter first left Brooklands, it was in some such mood as this. He went back to the busy world again. It was some little time before he could realise to himself the fact that he had indeed left it, with little or no hope of ever returning. Counting time by heart-throbs, by hours, ay, or even moments, of pure unadulterated happiness, instead of by the calendar, he had lived his life of joy there ; now the crisis had come. He must turn his back upon the old delightful days, and tread through the long years to come, unbrightened by the sight of Margaret's beauty, uncheered by the sound of her sweet voice. *That*, so far as he was concerned, was mute for ever. Yet though time and distance might separate them, he fancied that the tones of her sweet voice, reproduced by memory, would linger in his ear, and never die out. Even amid the noise and turmoil of men, in crowded streets, or thronged highways and by-ways, he would hear that silvery sound still ; as they say an angel's whisper maybe heard when the storm of passion is rising to its highest.

From the first moment when he had yielded to temptation and entered Brooklands, he had known what the end would be. But he would not think of it, he had thrust it by into a corner of his mind, to lie with the other skeletons that were there, and would not look it in the face. He laid to his heart that motto of the strong, as well as of the weak, "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

And the evil had come. Like Adam of old, he was driven from his paradise : not with a curse upon his brow.

but with the weight of a father's crime laying heavy on his heart, darkening his life, and stretching far into the future, as far as his thoughts could reach. Some grim shadowy presence seemed to follow him everywhere, striding by his side, as he elbowed his way through crowded thoroughfares, and sitting by his hearthstone when he was alone. Well, it had at least left him for a time ; there had been no shadow between him and Margaret, as they sat dreamily theorising in the sunshine, or wandered through the dark pine woods of Brooklands. Now that it had come back to him, he would try to endure its presence, and no more seek forgetfulness. His cross was heavy, but he would try and bear it bravely in the eyes of men, as well as in the sight of God. He would devote himself, heart and soul, more than ever to his work. He would allow himself no time for vain regrets, no time for rest. His whole life should be full of work ; and in alleviating the pains and sorrows of others, he would find some balm for his own.

Strange to say, there were moments when he could scarcely comprehend himself. He had fancied that whenever the cloud should break over him at Brooklands it would crush him utterly ; and he was amazed to find how much strength and courage remained in him. It was true Mr. Brookland had spoken hard and cruel words to him ; but the daughter's commiseration had atoned for the father's want of charity. Her sympathetic spirit had braced his nerves ; and when they clasped hands, and she had said, "If I had a brother I would have him act as you have done," her clasp seemed to tighten upon his heart. *She* saw no stigma on his name, no shame upon his brow. Her ennobling words had seemed to ennoble him ; and *he* who had stood unabashed in her pure bright presence, had no right to be ashamed before the world. Hence he gathered new strength, and went on his way bravely. He did not argue exactly in this fashion, but he felt that her sympathy had lightened his burthen, and her influence followed him into the world, and unconsciously guided and animated his actions.

On returning home from a long wearying round of parish business, a few days after his dismissal from Brooklands, he was startled to find Margaret Griffiths going about in her

old way at his lodgings in Clerkenwell. His face flushed. Had she been sent away in disgrace, or punished for his sin?

"Margaret," he exclaimed, "what has happened at Brooklands? Why are you here? Who sent you away?"

"Nobody;" and as she spoke a half guilty, half defiant look clouded her dark eyes. "They said you had quarrelled with Mr. Brookland, and been sent away—and heaps of other things—and I told Mrs. Foster she was a liar. She gave me a slap; I gave her another, and flung my shoe at her—and—" she hesitated and blushed. Paul could hardly help smiling at the idea of a battle royal between the rebellious child and Mrs. Foster; but he looked very grave and said,—

"I am very sorry to hear you have so far forgotten yourself, Margaret. Of course your bad behaviour was reported to Miss Brookland, and she sent you back to me."

"No, she didn't; but I couldn't abide her being angry—and you huffed away—so I runned away myself."

"Ran away from Brooklands! Impossible!" exclaimed Paul, incredulously. "Come, tell me the truth—all the truth, remember——"

"I never tell lies, and I have told the truth. I never said I'd runned all the way; but I was sitting on a stile resting and crying, for I didn't mind which road to take, and a gentleman comed along, as turned out to be Mr. Craig; and he spoke to me, and asked me what I was doing so far from Brooklands, and why I was crying. So I up and told him—for he hates Mrs. Foster, and she hates him. He said it was shameful, and offered to go back with me; but I wouldn't, so he gave me some money and I came by the railroad; and there was a school coming home for holidays, and they sang and hollered so, I felt like coming home too." The mention of Mr. Craig's name drew Paul's attention entirely away from Margaret's delinquency.

"What do you know of Mr. Craig, that he should give you money to leave Brooklands?" he said.

"Oh, I haven't seen him often; but I've heerd heaps about him. He's very handsome and clever; and they say he's going to marry Miss Brookland."

Paul turned away, and bending his head over his papers,

busied himself with them, that she might not notice the change that swept over his face.

"Who says this—'they' is a vague term?" he said inquiringly.

"Everybody in the servants' hall," she answered; "and they talk a deal about the grand doings there'll be then."

Margaret, glad enough to direct his attention away from herself, gave the reins to her tongue, and let it run into a long line of gossip, filling his ears and racking his heart with all the chitchat, wonderings, and surmises that she had heard; always coupling the name of Margaret with Mr. Craig. He stopped her at last, he could bear it no longer.

"I am tired and sick at heart," he said. "I have had a hard day's work. Go to bed, child; I will talk to you to-morrow."

His uneasy tone struck Margaret with remorse. She fancied her conduct had made him "heart-sick and weary." She dropped on her knees beside him, took his hand in both her own, saying,—

"You are not angry—not very, very angry at what I have done?"

"No, no," he answered, "I am not angry, only grieved."

"I do not want to grieve you; I would rather you would be angry than grieved," she said impetuously. And he was obliged to rouse himself, and talk to her and lecture her in the old way, before she could be brought to leave him for the night.

Paul had no difficulty in believing the truth of what the girl had so lightly uttered. Lucy had told him that Mr. Craig was a frequent visitor at Brooklands; and Paul Wynter knew that Joel Craig was handsome, clever, agreeable, witty, and possessed all those qualities that are so attractive to women. It was no matter of surprise that he and Miss Brookland, being constantly thrown into each other's society, should be mutually drawn together. Nor was it any wonder that he should adore Margaret. Paul greatly exaggerated the power of personal beauty. Being deficient in stature and strength, and what is generally considered "beauty" in a man, he greatly exaggerated the value of it in others; and imagined it to be far more important in women's eyes than it really is. The tender pity and commiseration

that Margaret's looks, words, and manner expressed for him and his misfortunes, were by no means irreconcilable with her great love for another ; " for of course she loves him," he said grimly to himself as he sat staring at the fire ; " and no wonder, with his cold, crafty ways and handsome face, how could she help it ? But ah ! the pity of it, the pity of it ! " he moaned aloud.

He felt a vague terror for her, as though she were threatened with some great danger. A rock ahead had suddenly appeared in her way of life. A rock on which the lives of so many fair women have struck and gone down to their sad fate ; a fate from which the warnings of friends, or the voice of experience, could not save them. " Other women may have been wrecked and ruined, but I shall be safe," is the general cry ; each having a sublime faith in the companion and guide she has chosen. He shuddered at the idea of Joel Craig being the guide and companion of Margaret Brookland, the ruler of her destiny. What should he do ? What *could* he do to save her ? Time was when, perhaps, his word might have had some weight with Mr. Brookland, and at least have induced him to make some inquiries into Mr. Craig's antecedents ; now it was too late. The mere fact of his interfering on so delicate a subject, might only incense Mr. Brookland, and operate in Mr. Craig's favour. After all, putting the case clearly to his own conscience, what had he got to advance against Joel Craig ? Nothing in reality, only bare suspicions, which, might, or might not, be groundless ; but, relying on his own instincts and his father's statement, he believed them to be true. But his instincts would go for nothing, and of what avail would be the word, or even oath, of a convicted felon, against a man who had been the chief witness against him ? There was not a tittle of evidence to show that Mr. Craig had been any other than a most reluctant witness against his best friend and benefactor. The distress with which he had given his testimony was seen by the whole court, which sympathised with him heartily, but the law compelled him to speak. Paul thought calmly and dispassionately of these things, and reconnoitered his position from all sides ; and the more he did so, the more he felt his utter helplessness. Yet something must be done to save her—something he

must do. He could not rest ; he must make one effort to be heard ; his conscience would not let him be still.

That night, before he slept, he wrote a long letter to Mr. Brookland, telling him of the rumour he had heard, but not how he had heard it. He begged him, for the honour of his own old age, and for his daughter's happiness, to consider well before he allowed matters to go on to the end. Briefly and faithfully he told the story of Mr. Craig's connection with his unfortunate father, extenuating nothing—exaggerating nothing. He put no seal of secrecy upon his communication ; he would not have worked underground, not even to undermine an enemy. On the contrary, he courted inquiry, and suggested that his letter should be shown to Mr. Craig, that he might have the opportunity of defending himself, and putting the matter in his own light. Mr. Brookland's own judgment must decide upon the truth.

At the same time, he addressed a few lines to Miss Brookland, entreating her to receive Margaret Griffiths again under her protection ; apologising for her rudeness to Mrs. Foster, and extenuating, so far as it was consistent with delicacy, the outburst of a passionate heart in defence of an absent friend.

"I should be deeply grieved," he added, "if her gratitude to me robbed her of your kind countenance, which, you must know, is invaluable to one so utterly alone in the world as she is."

From Mr. Brookland he received no answer ; from Miss Brookland there came an immediate reply, expressing not only her willingness to receive Margaret, but her anxiety that she should be immediately sent back to Brooklands.

"I have almost learned to love the child," she said. "As for her little escapade, that I can easily forgive. Gratitude is of such rare growth, that even if it shoots out slightly awry, I am inclined to look kindly upon it."

It was evident that Margaret Griffiths had not lost favour in the sight of Miss Brookland. At Paul Wynter's desire, the girl went back at once. Indeed, in his quiet way, he had established so firm an influence over her, that he could calm her wild rebellious spirit by a breath, or guide her

wavering will by a single look. She never dreamed of disputing with him, and his word had become her law.

About that time there was a great deal of sickness in the prison and the surrounding neighbourhood—in fact, it amounted to an epidemic, and Paul Wynter was occupied day and night with his duties. This was exactly what he liked, what he most desired; his work had come to him, and he put heart and soul into it, and wandered from bed to bed among his fever-stricken patients, soothing and cheering some after the fashion of this world, and comforting the dying with the hope of another. He was truly the physician of the soul as well as of the body; his patients never chafed under his gentle ministrations, but were grateful for his words as well as for his medicines. Some of the most ribald among them listened patiently to him.

"I don't mind hearin' the doctor talk," said one—"I can understand 'un; but the parson talks worriting like a book—we don't neither on us seem at home at it, an' he puts t' plaster on t' wrong place somehows."

He had at least one satisfaction now—his life was no longer useless. One bright morning, languid and tired with his long labours—for he had been up the whole night—he passed out at the prison gates, feeling faint for want of fresh air, rest, and exercise. He was compelled to think a little of himself now; it would never do for him to break down while his professional duties were thickening round him. He must have some slight relaxation both of mind and body, or he knew what the result would be. He had received fair warning that he must not trifle too much with his own constitution, or, instead of being a help, he would be a burthen on others. He had not seen Claude Nutford for some time—not, indeed, since they had parted at Brooklands a few weeks back. So he thought he would pay him a visit at his lodgings in Islington, with which intention he bent his steps that way. He felt that the boy's fresh, frank nature would have an invigorating effect upon his own flagging spirits.

Arrived at the house, he proceeded at once to the painting-room, expecting to see the boy's bright face bent over his work as he gave a touch here, and a touch there, to his labour of love.

Paul had been so long accustomed to hear the moans of

pain, and plaintive murmurings of his patients, that his ear positively ached for the rich sound of Claude Nutford's voice, which he knew would ring out to welcome him. He tapped lightly at the door. Receiving no answer, he supposed that Claude was too deeply absorbed in his work to hear him, and entered without further ceremony. The room was in great disorder. Hammers, nails, straw, and shavings were scattered about the floor, as though some great work of packing had been going on. The easel was empty, and by its side, lying on the ground, was the young artist himself—pale and still, with a thin streak of blood oozing from his mouth! Quick as thought, Paul raised him up, laid him on the couch, and soon ascertained what was wrong with him. A brief examination served to inform his practised eye as to the true state of the case.

"Thank God! it is not so bad as I expected," he exclaimed, with a sigh of profound relief.

Having first summoned the landlady to his assistance, he proceeded in his calm, professional way, to do all that his experience prompted for the recovery of the lad; and presently he had the satisfaction of seeing Claude open his eyes.

At first they were weak and wandering, and he glanced feebly round the room, as though still half unconscious. But when at last they rested on Paul Wynter's anxious face, the light of recognition brightened them, though not with the same strong light and fire as of old. He stretched out his hand, and his friend's warm clasp closed over it.

"Why, dear old Doctor! you here! What's up?" said Claude, looking dreamily round the room. He passed his hand slowly across his eyes, adding, "I—I do not think I am quite myself—look here!"

His hand trembled like a leaf.

"No, indeed, Sir," exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, with all the disposition of her class to exaggerate an evil. "You are not yourself, but a long way from it; and if it had not been for the doctor coming in promiscus, in my opinion you'd have been dead upon the floor this very minute."

"Not quite so bad as that," said Claude, laughing faintly. Then turning to Paul Wynter, with a look of grateful inquiry, he added, "But I am afraid I have been making a

fool of myself—I recollect now—I fancy I have been working too hard lately. I finished her at last, though,” he added excitedly, “and she looked so beautiful and kind, that I could not bear to part with her—but she is gone now—I was obliged to send her off this morning. Now it all looks so desolate and empty,”—he looked round disconsolately as he spoke,—“I feel as though I should never be able to settle down to work again.”

“I see—I quite understand,” said Paul sympathetically.

“It is a great success, Doctor,” continued Claude, with flushing cheeks and brightening eyes. “I almost wonder how my hand created—I mean copied; God created—anything so beautiful. I used to set my lamp by the easel, and lie on the couch and look at her, till I fancied she would step out of the frame, take up the lamp, bid me ‘good night,’ and never come back again.”

“Don’t talk like that, Mr. Claude, pray don’t!” exclaimed his landlady, “or we shall think there’s a tile off somewhere. It’s downright unchristian to talk like that of a picture—not but what it’s handsome enough, wherever you got it from. Which certainly was not among the models that come crowding here; though, why they’re called models, I can’t say, except as models of brass.”

But Paul and Claude were too much absorbed to pay any attention to the woman’s chatter; and possibly her tongue might have run on unheeded till it was worn out, if she had not been summoned away on some domestic business.

“This must not go on, Claude,” said Paul seriously. “I no longer advise, I insist upon your having total rest and change for the next three months. You must go home to Cornwall.”

“To tell you the truth, that is exactly what I should like. I feel as though I had no strength. What poor creatures we are, Doctor! How this miserable body imprisons and controls the soul! I could work with my mind and never grow tired, but my eyes ache, my head swims, and my hand lets fall the brush! Ah! if I could only cast off the body, and live in the spirit, what a world of Art I would create!”

“But as you cannot cast off the body,” said Paul, soberly, “you must do as nature intended you should, treat it kindly, or it will revenge itself; as, indeed, it is doing

now. You have exacted too much from your strength, my boy, and now it is deserting you."

"I am getting home-sick, I fancy," said Claude. "I long to see the dear old dad, and the quiet nooks and corners of home again. It is a pleasant place. You know I was born there, and I seem to know every tree, and every blade of grass, and I am sure I could point out the very branches where I found my first birds'-nest, though it seems so long ago."

"Come, come, my boy, I must not have you talk too much just now," said Paul.

"Why, what has been the matter with me? I don't remember exactly. Were you sent for?" inquired Claude.

"No, but it is very fortunate I came in. You have broken a small blood-vessel and fainted. It is nothing of any consequence. I shall soon get you round."

For some days Paul Wynter gave Claude as much attention as he could possibly spare from his other patients, and as soon as he had sufficiently recovered his strength, accompanied him to the Paddington Railway, whence he was to start by mail train for Cornwall. There amid the hurrying to and fro of passengers, the whistling of engines, and all the clamour and confusion that preludes the departure of the mail train from a London station, they exchanged the last farewell words.

"I cannot bear to say good-bye. I wish you could flash along the wires, and drop down at Rose Vale," exclaimed Claude, throwing his arm affectionately round Paul Wynter, who smiled, and said, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling,—

"What, in the face of your amiable step-mother, Claude?"

"Oh! when she wraps her piety in lavender, and lays it by with her Sunday gowns, she's rather a pleasant party," replied Claude, and his eyes beamed with their old laughter-loving light. The bell rang—the passengers hurried to their places. Paul loaded him with wraps and parting directions. The doors clanged to. Claude leaned from the window, and once more they grasped hands with a long clinging clasp.

“Good-bye, Doctor. God bless you, dear old friend!” exclaimed Claude; and the words came so strong from his heart, they made his voice tremble.

“God bless you, my poor boy!” said Paul Wynter, fervently; and he shaded his eyes, and watched as the bellowing monster steamed away, and his flaming red eye was soon lost and buried in the darkness.





CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SPELL IS BROKEN.

“Let this be said between us here—
One love grows green when one turns grey ;
This year knows nothing of last year
To-morrow has no more to say
To yesterday.”

IN the morning, after Paul's departure from Brooklands, when they met at the breakfast table, a general restraint pervaded the whole party. The conversation was stilted, and there was no life in it ; it lacked the warmth and sparkle which their genial spirits generally gave to it. But their genial spirits, on this particular morning, seemed dead and buried, for the commonest remark, or attempted conversation, had something of funereal gloom, and it was the very ghost of a smile that fluttered from face to face. Even Mr. Craig's brilliant flashes spluttered and whizzed and went out, like damaged fireworks in a damp atmosphere. Mr. Brookland had an inward consciousness that he had not come out of his contest with Paul Wynter in brilliant colours ; that, indeed, he had not acted in accordance with his usual noble and generous nature ; and that Margaret, who misunderstood, and, he knew, condemned him, was herself the cause ; but he could not tell her that, he could not explain the feelings and the fears that had actuated him. He must be content to be misconstrued by the being he loved best on earth. It is no wonder that his face looked sadder, his

hair greyer than usual that morning. For it is hard to be misunderstood, even by meaner souls, in a world of strangers ; but to be mistrusted by the tender and true, who are entwined round our own heart-strings, is the hardest thing of all.

Mr. Brookland felt it so, for he loved as well as respected his daughter Margaret. She could not help noticing his altered look, for light sorrows tell heavily on grey hairs, and her heart yearned over him.

When the breakfast was over, instead of going on her old way, she followed him into his study, cut his newspaper, turned to his favourite column in the *Times*, and hovered round him, doing a thousand small matters that are in themselves nothing, and yet mean so much. Not a word passed between them, but a gleam of light shot from his pale eyes as she laid her hand in his, and dropped a soft kiss upon his forehead.

"Can I do anything more for you ?" she said, wistfully.

"Nothing, darling—nothing, my own child," he answered, drawing her near to him, and laying his hand caressingly upon her golden head ; but if you will order your pony-carriage, I should like you to drive me over to Hillington about twelve o'clock. And now go, darling ; Mr. Craig and I have a great deal of business to transact between this and then."

They understood one another better now. Such small mute signs are enough between people whose minds are *en rapport* with each other. At twelve o'clock, according to Mr. Brookland's desire, Margaret's elegant little equipage was at the door. They forthwith started for Hillington, and were not expected back till four in the afternoon.

Lucy hardly knew what to do with herself when they were gone. She peeped into the library, where Mr. Craig was seated, surrounded by pamphlets, papers, and documents, and evidently absorbed and buried in their contents, for he never lifted his eyes from the paper. She would not speak to interrupt him, though she felt lost and lonely. She thought he might have found time to exchange, at least, a few words with her, after he had been away so long. She wondered how the gas company was going on, and perhaps, re-awakened by Paul Wynter's words, some of her

old fears came back again. She did not believe that Joel Craig would wilfully wrong anyone. She had perfect faith in his honour; her only fear was lest his over-sanguine spirit might mislead him. She wandered about the house in an unsettled state of mind, not knowing what to do with herself.

Mrs. Creamly was seated in the morning-room, with her everlasting knitting, which seemed to have neither beginning nor ending, in her hand. Lucy could not sit down with *her*; there was something so irritating in her manner, and her eyes were full of mute reproaches. She made no allusion to her escapade on the past evening, but there was an expression of severe and outraged virtue, even in the placid smile upon her lips, as she said, "good-morning," that jarred on Lucy's spirit, and sent the blood tingling into her cheeks. She knew well enough that the mere fact of a girl rambling about the park late at night in the rain and darkness required some explanation, and that explanation she was not prepared to give—no, not even to Margaret. She felt that everyone—even the very servants—must be surrounding her with some suspicious wonderment, and hazarding conjectures, guesses, and insinuations about her, though no one uttered them aloud. She fancied she had provoked an enemy on every side of her, and she had clothed herself in a kind of mental armour, a suit of complete steel, ready to repel the first word that should be launched against her; but she was not inclined to enter into an ignominious contest with Mrs. Creamly, who had always disliked, always suspected her.

Lucy knew that if she had been accused of poaching, or even of child-murder, Mrs. Creamly would only have smiled and said, "Well, I am not surprised—I always expected it of her." It was almost indifferent to Lucy what construction Mrs. Creamly put upon her conduct, except inasmuch as she might have the power to prejudice her friends against her. If she could have spoken to Joel Craig, she would have told him everything, and acted according to his advice. But he was busy just then, and she must wait. Later in the day, no doubt she would find an opportunity of making her communication to him. Till then, what should she do? She soon decided, and gathering her drawing materials together,

she went out and perched herself on an elevated spot, from which there was a beautiful view of an old, half-ruined tower, and the winding river beyond it. There were many other pleasant features in the landscape, but she had often thought that altogether this would make a pretty sketch. So she set herself busily to work, spoiling paper and wasting innumerable bright colours, under the delusion that she was sketching from nature ; in which harmless occupation she found an escape from the many unpleasant thoughts that oppressed her. Sometimes she found herself gazing dreamily out over the sunlit panorama before her, putting in broad strokes and dashes of colour almost unconsciously. Soft misty memories of their own far away home stole gradually over her. She fancied she could see her father, in his hale, strong old age, striding along through the golden cornfields, or examining Mr. Brookland's favourite short-horns with critical eyes, his bronzed face wrinkling with admiration the while. He had been invited to pay a visit to Brooklands, and she wished he would come. She began to feel a little home-sick, and yearned for the sight of her kind indulgent father's face.

"Dear old dad !" she half sighed, and a soft humidity gathered in her eyes, as home thoughts and home affections gathered round her heart. She had been sitting there a long time, though making but small progress in her work. Do all she could, the old tower would not look square, nor stand straight. Presently, as she was beginning to think it was time to put up her materials and return home, she heard footsteps on the gravel path behind, and some few feet below her.

She was seated on a high grassy mound, which sloped down to the park and meadowlands on the one side, and on the other by a rather steep incline, to the wider part of the garden, which was laid out in hardy ferns, and plantations of rare shrubs and evergreens ; the descent being covered with brushwood, and crowned with fir-trees. Though Lucy could hear the gravel crackling beneath their tread, she could not see who was approaching with such slow measured steps. As they came nearer she heard voices—the voices of Joel Craig and Mrs. Creamly ! They seemed to pause for a moment, and then seated themselves on a rustic seat immediately below her.

"I shall go home the other way," she thought; "I do not want to interrupt their interview. I hope it is a pleasant one."

She was half offended, however. If he had time to dawdle about with Mrs. Creamly, he surely might have come in search of her.

Before she had time to leave the spot, she heard the mention of her own name! Her heart gave one bound, and then seemed to stand still. What could they have to say of her? Under the impulse of the moment, she held her breath, and leaned forward till she could hear every word that passed between them. Of course, Mrs. Creamly was giving a venomous version of the occurrence of the last night, and—but no, it was not so—it was Joel Craig himself who was speaking, in answer to something that had gone before.

"Ah! yes, it is sad—very sad," he said, speaking with grave deliberation, "but I do not know what is to be done. Miss Brookland, you say, is so fascinated, she will not hear a word said against the girl."

"No, indeed; it seems a crime even to think an unpleasant thought of Miss Nutford. If I venture to speak of her, I am snubbed with the grossest ill-breeding. Only last night I was bold enough to suggest that her conduct was not *quite* correct, when Miss Brookland (who has got a temper of her own, by-the-bye, though you may not have discovered it) flew into a most disgraceful passion, and flounced out of the room."

"Still something ought to be done—something must be done," said Joel Craig decidedly. "I think, to a certain extent, you and I are both responsible for the respectability of Mr. Brookland's household. Miss Brookland is most fortunate in having you for a friend, indeed I consider you in the light of a mother to her."

"Ah! I wish she thought so," exclaimed Mrs. Creamly with an injured sigh; "but those who are the most worthy are not often the most appreciated. This minx of a girl—this low-bred acquaintance of a day—has quite superseded me at Brooklands. I do not think Mr. Brookland himself quite approves of the association; but he is very weak, and gives way too much to Margaret."

"One cannot be surprised at that," rejoined Joel Craig with a sigh; "she is so very charming. Unfortunately for myself, I found that out long ago."

A prolonged "Umph! is that the case?" fell from Mrs. Creamly's lips. "Well, Mr. Craig, I must say—you know I am speaking to you quite frankly; I am a keen observer, and at one time I fancied there was some little love-making between you and Miss Nutford."

"My dear Mrs. Creamly," he answered, with a light, contemptuous laugh, "pray give me credit for better taste. But as we are speaking in the strictest confidence, and I see it is impossible to hide anything from a woman of your penetration, I may as well confess that Miss Nutford and I are not quite strangers. I am slightly acquainted with the whole family, but the little I know of them is by no means to their credit; indeed I was both shocked and surprised to find Lucy Nutford here, as the companion and bosom friend of Miss Brookland."

"But, Mr. Craig!" exclaimed Mrs. Creamly, with severe virtue, "surely, if you knew anything that should have weighed against this intimacy, it was your duty to speak to Mr. Brookland."

"Well, perhaps it was," said he, repentantly. "But I have a weakness—perhaps a too delicate sense of honour—where a woman is concerned. I could not speak when I knew my words would be fatally injurious to the reputation of a young, fragile, and beautiful girl."

"Fragile it seems in more senses than one," said Mrs. Creamly. "But, my dear Mr. Craig, you have allowed your chivalrous feelings of honour to blind your judgment. When a woman is young, beautiful, and vicious, she is more dangerous than when she is old and ugly!"

"True. And yet it is her very youth and beauty which rouses all that is chivalrous in our nature, and makes us inclined to shield and protect her, even against our better judgment."

"Well, thank God, I am only a woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Creamly. "I have no chivalrous feelings to blind my sense of moral right. I never shrink from my duty, however painful it may be; and I think it is my duty now to speak seriously to Mr. Brookland. I shall advise that this young

person be sent back with as little *esclandre*, as little remark as possible. It must be managed quietly. The least said about the matter, the better."

"I suppose that it is the best and wisest thing to do," said Joel Craig, reflectively. "I am sure a woman of your superior mind will do and say exactly the right thing that should be done and said. I acknowledge my weakness. But on the very first day of my arrival here, she begged me so hard to conceal the fact of our old acquaintance, that I promised to keep her secret, and I have kept it perhaps too long. But after the occurrence of last night, it must be evident to all eyes that Lucy Nutford is ——"

Before he could finish his sentence, he was startled by a rustling among the trees. The branches were parted aside, and Lucy herself, with a white face and great blazing eyes, the pupils of which seemed dilated to double their natural size, came out from the plantation, and stood half way between Joel Craig and Mrs. Creamly, glancing from one to the other with a look—oh! such a look—it was not sorrow, nor shame, nor indignation, but the concentrated essence of all three. A cold, bitter scorn seemed to be surging up from her heart, freezing the passion that trembled on her lips.

When she had first heard the mention of her own name, she had paused for a moment, irresolute whether to go away herself, or wait till they had passed on. She waited, perhaps unconsciously, curious to know what they could have to say about her. She would not have been surprised at any cruel slander that fell from Mrs. Creamly, because she felt she had given that lady a sort of foundation for scandal to work upon. And Joel—how would he take it? She had not had an opportunity of explaining to him that he had been the subject of conversation between her and Mr. Wynter, and that it was for his sake, and his only, that she could not clear herself from the sort of cloud that evidently surrounded her unexplained movements. But of course he would take her part; he would resent Mrs. Creamly's ill-natured remarks, whatever form they might take. She heard Mrs. Creamly utter her name, coupled with some slighting words, the meaning of which she could not fully comprehend, as they were merely the tail of a sentence,

Her lip curled slightly, but her pulse never stirred. What cared she for Mrs. Creamly's opinion!—*he* was there, and he would defend her better than she could defend herself.

At the first sound of his voice, when he spoke, as he did speak, the light died out of her eyes, her lips tightened, and her nerves seemed to stiffen into iron, and hold her spell-bound. She could not move, for her life, if it had been at stake; she could not have dragged herself from the spot. All her senses seemed merged into that of hearing;—not a word, not a syllable they spoke escaped her ears. Think! She did not think, she could not think. The cruel meanness, the falsehood, the treachery of this man, whom, in spite of all warnings, all misgiving, she had loved with all the strength of her strong nature, seemed to utterly crush and overwhelm her. She stood there with clasped hands, and head bent low, like a statue of stone. The last words he uttered, "It must be evident to all eyes that Lucy Nutford is ——" pierced her like a knife, and quick as thought she bounded down the slope and stood between them. If a bombshell had burst in their midst, they could not have been more surprised.

Both impulsively quailed and recoiled as she looked from one to the other.

"What?—pray finish your sentence! What is it that Lucy Nutford is?—pray speak! You can surely have no delicacy in adding, to my face, another lie to the slanderous heap you have uttered behind my back—coward!"

That last word came loaded with such a look of withering contempt as Joel Craig had never seen, had never thought to see upon a woman's face, especially on hers. He was utterly dumbfounded—he must have time to rally his forces, before he could attempt to answer her—"How much had she heard, or how little?"

"As for you," added Lucy, turning suddenly on Mrs. Creamly, and so giving him time to think—"you have always hated me—I may have been thoughtless, rude, and so provoked your dislike, but I never thought you would have stooped so low as this. You boast of being a gentleman born, are proud of your birth! your blood! your breeding! yet you conspire with that man to disgrace, to

ruin me, and make yourself his accomplice ! You mix your cruel venom with his slanderous lies, and plot to blacken my good name—to ruin me, who have never injured you ! Why, the lowest, the most base-blooded thing that calls itself a woman could do no more—no worse !”

Mrs. Creamly was startled by Lucy's sudden appearance, and abashed by the indignant scorn that flashed from her eyes. She made some faint attempt to interrupt her, but all her polite deprecatory gestures and words resolved themselves into a few ejaculatory phrases, in which “coarse language” and “vulgar passions” were the most prominent expressions. Perhaps she had an inward consciousness that her position was *not* the most honourable—for she winced under Lucy's open contempt, and looked at Mr. Craig, as though she thought his ready wit might extricate her from her unpleasant position. As he made no attempt to do so, she gathered her skirts together, muttered something about “listeners hearing no good of themselves,” and ignominiously fled. She had hardly turned her back, and was certainly not safe out of hearing, when Joel Craig burst into a loud, hearty fit of laughter.

“My dear Lucy,” he exclaimed, attempting to take her two hands in his. “Why, what a little vixen you are ! I knew you were there,” he added, pointing to the clump of trees above, “I knew it all along, and I brought that woman this way, and drew her out, on purpose that you might hear with your own ears the kind of enemy you have got at Brooklands. I forgot that, for the moment, I must seem odious too.” For a moment, Lucy stared at him in blank bewilderment ; his audacity seemed to take away her breath.

He added earnestly,—

“Surely you cannot really mistrust me ? Lucy, you must have known that I was only acting !”

“Yes,” she answered, with a bitter laugh, “I know you were acting—the part of a mean, cowardly traitor, the worst of traitors, for you slander and betray where you profess to love—and you acted to perfection.”

“But, Lucy —”

“Do not speak ! I *hate* the sound of your voice ! I—I could kill myself with anger when I think on what I have

done—how I have lowered myself for *you*! Against my will, against my conscience, I have kept your secret; and you turn it against me, and say that it was *I* who feared exposure, *I* who entreated you to keep silence!” Indignant anger had animated, and hurt pride supported her so far. Here some tender memory, some flush of the hope that had been, and was dead, came over her. She broke down utterly. The wounded spirit showed itself at last. “Oh! why have you done this? I loved you so, and you have broken my heart! If you had come to me—if you had only hinted, by a single word, that the charm of the old days was broken, that you wished all to be at an end between us, it should have been done. Not for the world would I have held you bound when you wished to be free. But we might still have been friends. I might still have regretted you. Now, even that poor consolation is denied me. I must despise you!”

“Hush! Lucy, hush! Do not talk so loud—so wildly,” he exclaimed, again approaching, as though he would soothe and calm her. But she shrank back, saying,—

“No, do not come near me—do not touch me! We can never be friends again—never be anything but strangers. If you had committed any crime, my conscience might have condemned you, but in my heart, God knows, I think I should have shielded you. But it is your execrable meanness that has made my whole nature revolt against you. An unmanly man is the basest thing that crawls!”

Joel Craig turned red, then white with rage, as the lash of the girl’s tongue fell on him. His eyes gleamed, and he positively writhed beneath the scorn that her looks expressed, even more than her words. He clenched his hands until the nails seemed to enter into his flesh. If he had dared, if only time and opportunity had been favourable, he would have slain her upon the spot, and stilled her tongue and her life together. He knew that, so far as she was concerned, one round of the game of life was over—by the cleverest finessing he could not win another trick. He answered her with as much calmness as he could assume.

“I see you are determined to have war, however much I may beg for peace. So war be it. But let us each reconnoitre our position. I suppose your first move will be

to sell me to the enemy? Revenge is sweet, especially to women."

"It may be," returned Lucy; "but I, at least, shall not taste of it. You need not be alarmed, I shall keep your secret still. If I had spoken when you first came here, it would have been right and honest then, but it would be vengeance now. No, I will not betray you. With my good will your name shall never soil my lips again. But we must both leave Brooklands. I am too sick at heart to remain here. I shall write to my father and beg him to summon me home. And you ——"

"I have transacted my business here, and will go away to-morrow," he said, hastily.

"Then go! I believe now all that my father said, all that the world suspects of you. There, do not say any more. I do not wish to hear another word. Go; but take care you gag that woman's mouth. At her peril, and at yours, let your joint scandal reach the ears of those I love."

She turned abruptly away, and walked quickly towards the pine-wood. There she remained for hours, pacing up and down with folded hands, and eyes bent upon the ground. In spite of her pride, her just indignation and anger, she was sorely stricken. She had tried to be proud and strong before him, and covered her wound that his eyes might not see it; but when she was alone it burst open, and drenched her soul with a storm of grief and regret.





CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BROOKLANDS IN LONDON.

“What, is it thou? or do mine eyes deceive
And show me that which I would fain believe?
The face I love—that haunts me every day
And all day long, until sweet tears arise
And fill and overflow and blind mine eyes?”



WITHIN a few days of her meeting with Joel Craig, Lucy received a telegram, summoning her home; and home she went, greatly to Margaret's regret. Brooklands seemed very dull to Margaret after all her guests had departed, and she was left to the sole companionship of Mrs. Creamly, the pleasures of whose society she did not appreciate so much as they perhaps deserved. The fact is, Mrs. Creamly had worried her with observations and remarks ever since Mr. Wynter's departure. She knew that some unforeseen and unpleasant occurrence had hurried him away, and she managed by some means to connect his going with Lucy Nutford's equally unexpected departure. And she insinuated as much to Margaret, whom she perplexed continually with mysterious, half-uttered words and ambiguous phrases, evidently intended as stimulants to her curiosity. But they failed in their object. Margaret steered as clear as possible from all mention of her friends. She would not talk of them to Mrs. Creamly, who, on her part, was dying to tell Margaret all that had passed between herself and Mr. Craig, when their interview had been

interrupted by Lucy's indignant intrusion. Her tongue positively itched to inoculate Margaret's ears with the cruel slander ; but somehow she could not. She dared not do it without a word of encouragement, and that word was never spoken. She began to hate the sight of the post-bag, for nearly every day it brought a letter from Lucy, and Margaret's face always brightened at the sight of it ; till Mrs. Creamly grew as jealous of the girl in absence as she had been when she was present. What could they have to say to one another ? More than once she expressed her wonder aloud—

"My dear Margaret," she would say, "what can you girls find to write about ? Such long letters, too—four pages, and crossed. If they were filled with good sense, now ——"

"Which they are not," Margaret would answer, with a charming smile. "I do not suppose there is a single atom of what you call sense in the whole of it. We do not profess to be sensible. We are quite content to be agreeable."

In truth, Margaret missed Lucy more and more every day. If it had not been for the occupation her young charge afforded her, she would have been lost indeed. She was interested in the formation of the child's character, and fancied that nature had clearly supplied the rough materials out of which a true and noble woman might arise. Once a week regularly the child wrote a long epistle to Mr. Wynter ; and on entering her little sanctum one morning, Margaret Brookland found her so occupied.

"Do not let me disturb you," she said. "I suppose you are sending all the news of Brooklands to Mr. Wynter ?"

"No, I'm not," replied the child. "But I should like to do so."

"Then I am sure you may. We have no secrets here."

"Ay, but he told me I was never to write of anything or anybody but myself," replied the child. "He said it would be like having a spy in the house."

Margaret's face radiated. "Ever noble and true !" she thought. But she only said,—

"He is quite right. Finish your letter, and then I shall want you to walk with me."

About this time Margaret fancied that her father was more grave, as he was certainly more occupied than usual. Many strangers too were coming backwards and forwards to Brooklands, not as guests — they were “gentlemen on business,” he told her.

“A great concern like ours, my dear child,” he said, “cannot be got up without much trouble and expense.”

“Is it the gas company you and Mr. Craig used to talk about?” said Margaret. “I hoped that was all done with.”

“Why should you hope that?” said he, quickly.

“Only because it gives you so much trouble.”

“I do not mind that,” answered Mr. Brookland; “because I believe it will be a magnificent thing in the end, though it certainly does entail a great deal of trouble, and also drains me of all my ready money.”

“Are you sure it is going on all right, papa?”

“Right! of course it is. How could it do otherwise, with such a keen, active brain as Mr. Craig’s at work! He is a wonderful man of business! Would you like to look at one of our prospectuses, my dear?”

He rummaged over his writing-table, and at last alighted upon the paper in question, which was indeed an elaborate and lucid prospectus, setting forth the object and capabilities of the company. A goodly array of well-known names guaranteed the respectability and genuineness of the concern. The list was headed by that of the Premier.

“You see, my dear, I have consented to be one of the directors,” added Mr. Brookland, pointing to his own name, which shone conspicuously among the rest. “And the First Minister of the Crown has positively consented to take the chair at our first committee. Why, such a prospectus as that would conjure the last shilling out of a widow’s pocket.”

“How odd that the Premier should interest himself in a gas company!” exclaimed Margaret, with a slight accent of disgust. “I should think he had quite enough to do with State affairs, without meddling in mercantile matters.”

“Not at all odd,” replied her father. “A man of his powerful and elevated mind can grasp small things as well as great—not that this is a small thing, but that is neither here

nor there. He can guide the helm of a troubled State, and yet give an eye to the tiniest craft that is sailing round him. His name alone will tempt hundreds to enter into our concern, who would otherwise have held aloof until large dividends were assured. They have no patience to wait while the money grows—they want to sow the seed and reap the harvest at the same time.” He paused a moment, and then added, enthusiastically—“It is really a magnificent scheme, Margaret. I consider Mr. Craig’s invention wonderful, and I hope it will reward him well—it ought, for at the present time gas is infamous, expensive, and monopolised by a few arbitrary companies. Now we, following the principles, and carrying out Mr. Craig’s ideas, can illuminate the whole of London brilliantly on the produce of the London sewers, and a private family can light up the whole house, as he comprehensively asserts, upon beef bones and the soles of old shoes! Why, my dear, it is absolutely wonderful. But I do not think you appreciate Mr. Craig.”

“Indeed, papa, I do. I think he is very clever, very amusing, very agreeable in society; but ——”

“But what?”

“Well, I do not exactly know how to explain myself, papa; but he does not seem real—I mean genuine; he confuses and puzzles me. I hear what he says, but I never seem to know what he means.”

“And I never knew a man who gave such lucid explanations,” said Mr. Brookland. “He seems to bring things down to the dullest comprehension.”

“It is not that—you do not understand me,” replied Margaret. “You know, papa, there are some people in whom you have implicit faith, on whose word or action you would rely as upon a rock. You have a sort of faith in them, that comes more from instinct than from reason. Well, I can never feel that sort of faith in Mr. Craig.”

“I am an old man now, my child,” said Mr. Brookland, “but, thank God, I have not yet lost my faith in my fellow-creatures. I believe every man to be true till he proves himself, or is proved by circumstances, to be a rogue. I think, and I hope you will one day find, that you have done Mr. Craig an injustice.”

“And when I do, darling, I will come and tell you so,”

she answered, kissing away the cloud that was gathering on his brow. "But I see you are busy," she added, "and I do not know what important matters I may be interrupting with my idle chatter; so I will leave you now."

"Stay a moment," said Mr. Brookland. "I think I shall have to run up to town next week—would you like to go with me? I am sure the change will do you good."

Margaret said she would be very glad to go, and inquired if they should remain long.

"I hardly know," he answered. "The elections are coming on, and I am not satisfied with what the papers tell me; they are all one sided. I want to see and hear for myself. One picks up more in a day's gossip at the club than the papers would tell us in a month."

He turned eagerly to his favourite columns in the *Times*, nevertheless.

Margaret's arrangements were soon made. She was not sorry to leave Brooklands for a time. The long summer days had passed so pleasantly in the companionship of the friend she loved, and now that the chilly autumn weather had come, they had all gone, and she was alone. No more merry chats, or long dreamy rambles with Lucy! No more theorising in the tender twilight with Paul Wynter, whose quaint, quiet sayings used to make the moments fly. They were both far away; and Brooklands had never seemed to her so desolate and lonely as now. When she walked out into the pine-wood, where they had all walked together, the breeze seemed laden with the echo of empty voices. She could not bear the solitude—it oppressed her; and many things came back to her memory that she had tried to forget, and fancied she had forgotten.

Paul Wynter's story troubled her. She fancied the old grey-headed father in prison, the son passing in and out, to and fro, with calm professional dignity, wearing a cheerful face when his heart must be wrung with anguish. He must undergo the daily torture of witnessing his father's sufferings and degradation, with no power to relieve him. He must pass him by as a stranger—pass by the bowed head and broken spirit, without a smile of recognition, a word of love!—except a touch or a look by stealth. It was a daily self-imposed martyrdom for the son, who bore all, endured all,

that he might give a gleam of comfort to the father who had disgraced and ruined him.

"It is noble !—it is sublime !" she would exclaim, half-unconsciously, aloud. Life at Brooklands seemed just then to be flowing slowly and sluggishly on ; there were no sparkling air bubbles on its surface, no whirling eddies in the stream. The mere current of existence crept lazily on, bearing Margaret's life with it, undarkened by clouds, and yet unbrightened by the sun. For the first time in her remembrance, she had a feeling of unmixed gladness at the thought of turning her back upon the old home, and leaving Brooklands and Mrs. Creamly behind her ; for that lady's fussy affection, and the mild tone of injured innocence she occasionally adopted, now acted as a constant irritant on Margaret's sensitive nerves.

Mr. Brookland's town residence in Curzon Street was undergoing repairs ; and as Margaret objected to an hotel, he had written to Mr. Craig, asking him to look out for some good lodgings, where they might instal themselves for a month. On their arrival at the railway station he was there to receive them, and conduct them to the apartments he had provided for them.

"I found some capital rooms in Bolton Street. I fancied you would like to be near your own house, as there might be many matters Miss Brookland would like to superintend."

His consideration was duly appreciated ; and, indeed, they had every reason to be satisfied with the arrangements he had made for their comfort. A bright pine-wood fire was crackling in the grate, diffusing a pleasant perfume, as well as a look of cheerfulness on all sides ; and though it was November, he had ransacked Covent Garden for the choicest and rarest flowers, and had filled all the vases with the gay-coloured fragile things. The sofas and chairs were disposed in the most cosy fashion, and one of Broadwood's pianos stood invitingly on one side of the room, and a pile of music lay on the what-not by its side.

Margaret declared the apartments were quite charming, as indeed they were. Under his superintendence they had lost that blank, empty look with which even the best class of furnished apartments daunt our hearts, when we have left

our own cosy home behind us. Margaret looked round with a grateful smile.

"It is all delightfully arranged," she said, giving her small gloved hand to Mr. Craig. "I do not know how you have managed to give a strange place such a pleasant home-look. You have been so thoughtful, too; I never expected to find a piano here!"

"I took the liberty of sending it in from Chappell's, and that collection of music also. I selected it, very carefully, myself. I thought you might like to try the pieces over. I think you will find the cream of your favourite composers, Gounod and Mozart, there."

"I am afraid you will have to pay the penalty of your good nature, and drop in sometimes of an evening to hear her play," said Mr. Brookland in a highly gratified tone.

"Pray do not offer me such a premium as that," said Mr. Craig, "or I do not know what frantic folly I may commit. I am sure you know how deeply I appreciate your kindness, Mr. Brookland; but what does St. Cecilia herself say?" He glanced at Margaret, who had crossed to the piano, and was running her fingers over the keys.

"If you mean me," she answered, "I say that if you choose to waste an hour, I shall be very happy to play to you."

"The wasted hour will be changed to golden moments," he answered. "When you play, Miss Brookland, it is not the ivory keys alone you touch—you play upon our heart-strings; and if our thoughts will move to music, you set them all in motion."

"Two compliments in less than one minute, Mr. Craig!" exclaimed Margaret; "I am afraid you will never be cured of that shocking bad habit."

"Never, certainly, while you are present. You create the disease, and then, ——"

"What! you mean to say I fish for compliments?" exclaimed Margaret, interrupting him with a disdainful air.

"No," he answered, "but you make thoughts, and draw words up from the heart to the lips—words that I at least dare not speak—" He paused a second, and then added with his usual gay tone of courteous gallantry—"but any

gentleman may pay a compliment to any lady—and use it merely as a silver covering to a golden truth.”

“Oh! no,” said Margaret, “he may use it to cover a spurious counterfeit which he wants to pass off as pure gold. As you know, they give a child a dose of Gregory in a spoonful of raspberry jam.”

“You always laugh when I say anything beyond the commonest civility to you. The least attempt to round a phrase or polish a compliment is sure to ——”

“It is not polish at all, it is only varnish, that so easily rubs off! But why should I not laugh at your high flown-speeches. Would you have me blush and look silly, as though I thought more of them, or of you, than you are really worth?”

“Ah! you are very cruel, Miss Brookland,” he answered, laughing, though with a half rueful expression of countenance. “You deal most merciless blows at my self-esteem, and wound my vanity even when I am least conscious of offending.”

“Ay, but, phrenologically speaking, your conscientiousness is small, and your love of approbation so large as to be too easily wounded.”

“We are discussing phrenology,” exclaimed Mr. Craig, addressing Mr. Brookland, who at that moment re-entered from the adjoining room, which was to serve him as a kind of study during his brief stay.

“Discussing phrenology, were you,” he answered. “Ah! Margaret laughs at that, as young people are apt to do at things they do not understand.”

And their talk drifted away to other matters.

From the very first day of their arrival in London, Mr. Craig was their constant visitor. Every day there was something to be done, and somehow he was always there to do it. If Miss Brookland inadvertently expressed a wish, he set himself immediately to work to gratify it, in the most unobtrusive way possible. He always made it appear that it was her father, whose delicate attention, not only gratified, but sometimes anticipated her lightest wish. A certain deferential courtesy, half reserve, crept into his manner towards her; but he had such a fund of good nature, such droll anecdotes to relate, such a vigorous flow of spirits, as

could not fail to affect those who were his companions even for an hour, and Margaret herself began to look forward to his coming. Things seemed, in some way, to be different from what they had been at Brooklands. There was something *there*, either within herself or her surroundings, with which his presence seemed to jar discordantly. It seemed to break the sanctity of the old home, and to clash rudely with the quaint, quiet atmosphere of the ancient hall. *Here*, in a strange place, with the busy world wheeling and whirling round her, his presence seemed more natural—it harmonised with surrounding things, and was certainly more acceptable to her. Not that her prejudices against him had by any means disappeared, they had only shifted their ground slightly. In his absence they were as strong as ever ; but when he was present they were but dimly shadowed out. Sometimes she reproached herself for not feeling more kindly towards him, for she could not help appreciating his devoted attention to her father, who had never been a strong man, and now gave occasional signs of the gradual failing and weakening of the system, which approaching age brings with it. The very first day he was in London, he complained of giddiness in his head, which seized him at odd moments. And one evening when he came home, he told Margaret he had been seized with a kind of vertigo in the public streets—so much so, that he had been glad to lean against some railings for support.

“You must never walk out alone, papa, never again,” said Margaret. “I must have you taken care of, or I shall never be happy. I shall always fancy that something has happened, or is going to happen to you.”

Mr. Craig was present when this little passage passed between father and daughter. He caught sight of Margaret’s anxious face, observed the lip quiver at the idea of any danger falling, even from God’s own hand, upon the beloved father’s head, and he smiled a smile that Margaret understood well. Mr. Brookland laughed at her nervous fears, and quietly ridiculed the idea of “being taken care of.” Men never like being looked after. The more they need it the less they like it ; and he seemed more than ever bent upon wandering about alone. He was fond of penetrating into odd nooks and corners, into courts and alleys, that are

quite unknown in the polite world. He knew where he was likely to pick up odds and ends of quaint china, or other antiquarian curiosities ; and he liked nothing better than to roam through these regions, rout over old book-stalls, peeping mysteriously under covers and between leaves. It happened once in his life that, so searching, he had found a treasure in the shape of a tattered remnant of an old MS., and he was always hunting about in the hope of finding another. From that day, however, he seldom made those searches alone. Mr. Craig generally managed, on some pretence or another, to accompany him ; or, if it was impossible to do that, he would waylay him, and get into some pleasant conversation. Mr. Brookland never objected to his company, he only thought he was most fortunate in meeting him so often ; he never imagined the meeting was by design. And when Mr. Craig accompanied him home on those occasions, Margaret's sweet eyes thanked him, and her warm welcome more than repaid him for his trouble.

It was one of those dull chilly autumn evenings that make one shiver even more than the biting frost, when the snow is on the ground. A drizzling rain was pattering against the windows, and Margaret was playing in the twilight, letting her fingers wander slowly and dreamily over the keys, while Mr. Craig and her father sat quietly discussing their business affairs at the other end of the room. They had engaged capital offices, so Mr. Craig was informing him, in Victoria Street, Westminster, which was a most convenient and central locality. They were to have a meeting in full committee in the course of ten days. Mr. Brookland was anxious to pay a visit of inspection to the offices before that time, but Mr. Craig dissuaded him from doing so.

"The fact is," he said, "the workmen are not yet out of the place, and as I am chief manager, and am rather proud of my arrangements, I want you to receive a favourable impression on first entering the office. You cannot do that when you are stumbling over bricks and mortar, and run an imminent risk of being poisoned among the collection of paint-pots and new varnish."

"I see how it is," replied Mr. Brookland. "You want to make everything smooth for me. You are a good fellow,

Craig. I do not know how to repay you for all the trouble you are taking."

"Do not say that," he answered; "the thanks are all due from my side. The idea is mine, and but for your kind help and encouragement, it would be but a barren thought; now I hope it will be a fruitful speculation. You have set the matter going, and helped to supply the sinews of war, and I devote my energies to carry it on."

They continued talking till the lights were brought in, the chess-board arranged, and they sat down to a game of chess, in which Mr. Brookland greatly delighted. Margaret's playing disturbed his thoughts, he said. So she left off and came and sat down by his side, watching the game, and sitting in judgment upon the players, now and then whispering little loving suggestions into her father's ear; and when at last he succeeded in checkmating his adversary, she took all the credit to herself, and declared it was her good counsel that brought about such a favourable result. Mr. Brookland was always beaming when he won the game, for it was not often that Mr. Craig allowed himself to be beaten.

He always took his leave early, so about ten o'clock he bade them "good-night." For some time after his departure, father and daughter sat cosily chatting by the fireside; and when at last they were retiring to their rooms, Mr. Brookland declared he had not felt so brisk and well for a long time. Margaret had that day received a letter from Lucy; but she had not had time to enjoy it thoroughly until she found herself alone in her own bed-room. There, when the whole house was still and quiet, there was not a sound to disturb her thoughts, and no fear of interruption. She sat down to read her friend's letter, with her heart as well as with her eyes. Lucy was not very communicative about herself, but she dwelt very much and very sadly upon her brother Claude. He was seriously ill, she said, and so weak he could scarcely walk across the room. "Yet he never complains," she added, "but when he can, he makes jokes about himself, and keeps us alive by his cheerful ways; though we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that he is in great danger, and my poor father is broken-hearted." Margaret read the letter over and over again, and fancied

that each reading revealed more and more the spirit of the writer. "She thinks he will die," murmured Margaret, as she dropped the letter, and sat for awhile gazing into the fire, recalling the bright handsome face of the lad, his sublime genius, and the rich joyous laugh that used to ring through the woods at Brooklands. It seemed terrible for death to take so much youth and genius from the earth, when there was so much age and misery that would be glad to go. She shivered as though its icy breath had touched her own blooming cheek. "I will write to Lucy," she said, "and cheer her, and comfort her, if I can." She sat down to her writing-table to carry out her intention. Her thoughts guided her pen and sent it quickly along. Suddenly she heard a heavy fall upon the floor of the chamber above her. "My father's room;" she thought, and hurried up the stairs to see what was the matter. She found him upon the ground—his eyes fixed upon the door, as though he knew that she would come.

"Lift me up! lift me up!" were the only words that came gurgling in suffocating accents from his throat. She rushed to his side, and struggled with all her puny strength to raise him, screaming all the while for help. He lay there motionless, and heavy as lead. She managed to raise his head, and drench his face with cold water, continuing to call for help until her cries roused the household, who, still half asleep, rushed affrightedly into the room. They soon raised Mr. Brookland up and laid him on the couch.

"A doctor—pray fetch a doctor!" was all Margaret could say, as she wrung her hands and looked appealingly round her. But as her eyes fell upon their drowsy faces, she felt instinctively that she could fetch a doctor and be back again before they were well awake! What feet could fly so fast as hers, that were winged with love and fear? She flung a cloak over her head, rushed down the stairs, and out into the dark night; the wind and rain beating upon her white face, and drenching her golden hair. Her brain was in a whirl. She did not know which way to go, which way she wanted to go. She was too frightened to think. She had a vague notion that she would run till she saw a red lamp, which she knew was the doctor's signal. She literally flew along the streets, searching on all sides for the signal

light. Her father might die—die for want of help before she could return ! As she flashed round a corner suddenly, she was caught in a man's arms, and a voice she knew, ah—knew so well, exclaimed in amazement,—

“Good heavens, Miss Brookland !” A burst of wild hysterical laughter and tears burst from her.

“Ah ! thank God ! thank God ! you will save him !”

She caught Paul Wynter's hand, and dragged him along. They sped rapidly over the wet pavement, silent, except for her low sobs and broken words. He accompanied her in mute bewilderment, like one in a dream.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

DOCTOR AND PATIENT.

“Oh, call him back! he is my all, my own;
I cannot stay in this wide world alone.”



HE first glance on Mr. Brookland's face showed Paul Wynter what deadly enemy was grappling with him. He had been seized with paralysis!

Margaret's grief was piteous to behold. She threw herself on her knees beside him. “Oh! papa! open your eyes—speak to me!—do speak! Do not go—do not leave me! He is all I have in the world!” she moaned distractedly. But the doctor had no eyes, no ears, no thought for anyone but his patient. He requested her to leave the room, saying,—

“Leave your father to me. All that man can do for him shall be done. I think you may trust me.”

“Oh! yes—yes, I trust you,” she answered, helplessly, as she mechanically obeyed him. But she could rest nowhere. She heard the hurrying of feet to and fro, and crept back and knelt down, with her hands clasped, and her cheek pressed against the door of the room, listening breathlessly to every sound that passed within it. She did not know how long she had been there, for every moment seemed an age, when the door opened and Paul Wynter raised her up. She lifted her eyes to his face, and her heart leaped into her throat, as he said in a low voice,—

"You may see your father now ; but you must not speak to him, nor excite him to speak to you."

She followed him into the room with noiseless footsteps and bated breath, and bent over the bed where her father lay. Yes, he lived. The temporary death had passed away, and he lived still. The dear eyes were open, weak, feeble, and wandering, it is true ; but when they rested on his daughter's face, they were lighted up with a feeble, faint light that was strong enough to reach her heart.

"He knows me ! thank God—thank God !" she murmured, and a soft rain of tears fell from her eyes. She was not allowed to remain there beyond a moment. Paul Wynter motioned her to leave the room, and she crept away as noiselessly as she had entered. He followed her, and for a moment their hands met as they stood in the shadow of the darkened doorway.

"We must take care of you, or I shall have two patients instead of one," he said. "Your hands are like ice, and you are shivering with cold. Pray take off your wet clothes and go to bed at once. I believe your father is safe now ; the worst is over ; but I will not leave him. I will watch by him, if you like, until I am compelled to go my rounds in the morning."

"If I like !" repeated Margaret, with quivering lips and eyes suffused with tears ; "as though I should not be grateful to you as long as ever I live—" She paused in deep agitation for a moment, and then added, "God sends you to us always in our trouble. Oh ! Mr. Wynter, can you ever forgive us ? It was just such a night as this when we turned you from our doors."

"It was all right—at least, no man could say it was exactly wrong," he answered, with his calm quiet smile. "Do not speak of it—do not think of it—it is all past and gone. Good-night. Keep your mind easy ; try and rest. You know I will be a faithful watcher. Trust me."

Rest ! how could she rest ? Her brain was in a whirl. The occurrences of that night seemed like a dream. Could it be true that her father had lain in the grasp of death ?—that there had been but a span of time between him and eternity ? His life had hung by a thread between two

worlds ; but the thread tightened and drew him back to this. He lives—she was not alone in the world ; and when the time came they would go back to Brooklands, and live the old pleasant life over again. She would be always with him, and watch over him carefully—oh ! so carefully now, more than ever. She felt the words of the prayer, though she did not utter them aloud—“ I have left undone many things that I ought to have done.” For every sad look—though there had not been many that had ever crossed his face—she reproached herself now.

Through all the long, loving years they had passed together she had never thought that a time would come when the light would die out from his kind eyes, the smile fade from the lips, the voice be mute, the heart still, and the dear grey head laid low in the damp stifling earth, deep down, away from the sunshine and sounds of life—lying there, stark and still, alone with the earthworm and decay. There would be no master of Brooklands—no father to Margaret !”

She thought of all this now. She might have lost him. Nay, might lose him yet ! And her heart sank sick and stricken within her ! How empty this world would be to her, Margaret Brookland, if she had no father to fill it ! But Paul Wynter had said he was safe, and she believed him. Then she thought of their strange meeting, and blushed, half ashamed. Was it true that she had been rushing along the London streets alone at midnight ? She had thought nothing of it at the time. She only knew that her father was in danger, and she was seeking for help somewhere, and help had come. Now that she had time to think, her timid nature was abashed at its own boldness, and troubled her with a thousand odd fancies and fears of what might have been, if she had not met Paul Wynter. She had felt nothing of the cold, the wind, nor the rain *then*, but she felt them *now* ; though she sat there in her own warm cosy nest, and shivered and crouched over the fire. The searching wind seemed to have seized upon her very bones and gripped them till they ached ; she felt as though she should never be warm again. She sat there pondering and thinking, through the long weary hours, till her fair young face grew white and wan, and her features

seemed sharpened by that one night's sorrow, so sharp and bitter it was.

She stole to her father's door many times and listened, but all was still. She even fancied she could hear the calm regular breathing of the watcher mingled with the more fitful breath of the sleeper. Then she crept down-stairs again. The cold grey November morning broke at last. The leaden clouds hung overhead, and there seemed to be no atmosphere, nothing but a thick heavy mist that shrouded the houses and wrapped them in mysterious gloom. The heavy air seemed to have seized upon the waking world, and muffled its voice till it became a smothered sound. Before the dull day-light had fairly appeared, a servant brought her a cup of hot tea and a message from the doctor, who desired his compliments to Miss Brookland, he would be going soon, and would be glad to see her before he left. It need hardly be said that she hurried down in answer to his request. He came forward to greet her, and his smile seemed to light up the whole room, as he said,—

“I have a very fair report to make of my patient, Miss Brookland. We have had a much better night than I expected.”

“Oh, I am so thankful—and you are so kind,” said Margaret, gratefully; but her face changed; she was hurt and angry, and her heart swelled with indignation as he added,—

“If you will kindly tell me who is your father's physician, I shall be very happy to see him, and tell him all I have done so far, and give him up into his hands.”

“You will not do that—it would be cruel!” said Margaret, his proposal took her so entirely by surprise. “It was perhaps too much to expect you to forget and forgive; but I never thought you would stoop to such a pitiless revenge.”

“Revenge!” he echoed, amazed at the sudden storm his professional delicacy had raised.

“What else could you call it? What motive but revenge could you have for leaving him now? Chance compelled you to save his life. You could not, you dared not for your professional honour have turned your back and left an old

man to die! You have had time to think; perhaps you repent that you came here with me last night? No matter, you have begun your work, and a doctor has no right to leave his patient until he is well. If my father were a pauper you would not dare to treat him so." Her whole manner softened, as she added, "I know we must both be hateful to you—we have no right to expect good at your hands; but I never thought you would have the heart to do such a thing as this ——"

"You mistake—you misunderstand me utterly," he exclaimed, as soon as she would give him time to speak. "Chance, you say, compelled me to save your father. Miss Brookland, I tell you that I bless God for the chance that made our paths cross to-night; to have saved your father's life—a life that is dear to you—I would gladly have laid down my own."

"Then why do you propose to desert him now?" said Margaret, impressed by his earnestness; "when you know there is no one in the world in whom both he and I have so much faith as in you."

"I will answer you faithfully," he said, "if you will first answer me. Do you think, if your father had a voice in this matter, if he had been able to name the medical attendant he would wish to have, do you think he would have chosen me?"

"No," replied Margaret, candidly, "I do not think he would; but when he knows all, I am sure he will be most grateful for the chance that sent you here."

"I think not," he answered, shaking his head dubiously. "I believe that I am the last man in the world whom he would like to see at his bedside. There are many physicians in London—men of world-wide renown—who would be happy to devote all their skill and experience to your father's case."

"Would they remain with him, and nurse him, and watch over him as you have done?" she asked.

"Yes, if necessity demanded, certainly they would," he answered; "and if you have no family physician, Miss Brookland, I shall be very happy to recommend to you a friend of my own, who would keep me well informed of your father's progress."

"Thank you," said Margaret, gazing out into the mist with a far-away look in her eyes.

A greater earnestness came into Paul Wynter's voice as he resumed,—

"Chance has brought us together again face to face, Miss Brookland, but I cannot take advantage of it—I cannot avail myself of a chance occurrence to try to regain the position I have lost in your father's confidence; and I could not bear—I would not run the risk of being a second time driven from his doors."

"You must think we have bad blood in us indeed, if you suppose that such a thing as that could happen," she answered. "If you have no other motive for wishing to discontinue your visits to my father than those you have named, I beseech you to attend him till either he or I give you your dismissal. I ask this favour of you, not as a friend—we have lost—we have deserved to lose our friend—but ——"

"Say no more, Miss Brookland," interrupted Paul Wynter, deeply grieved that she had misunderstood him—that she did not even now comprehend his scruples. Well, perhaps it was best to be so; yet the idea that she fancied she had lost her friend—that he was cold and unsympathetic, and unwilling to serve her or hers, or gave his aid grudgingly—cut him to the heart. He could not trust himself to say so much. It was all very well while their conversation was confined to business, but when she alluded to the past, her soft upbraiding voice, and the hurt look that came into her face, were almost too much for him to bear. But when he answered her, he spoke with his usual professional calmness. "Do not speak another word upon this matter; you have vanquished any scruples I might have had. So long as it is your will, I shall be happy to devote myself to your father. He is sleeping now, but he will require great care. I will return again as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I will endeavour to procure an experienced nurse."

"Is that necessary?" exclaimed Margaret—"cannot I be his nurse?"

"No—it is impossible," he answered; "you have neither the strength nor the experience that is required for his case."

He gave her all necessary directions respecting her father, but when he turned to go, she put out her hand, saying,—

“If I have said anything unkind or ungenerous, I beg your pardon, and—we are friends, are we not?”

“Friends!—yes, friends, I pray God, till the last!”

He held her hand, and looked upon her white face. Its bloom seemed to have faded away in a single night. Poor, faded flower!—if the first breath of sorrow changed it so, how would it be if the rude wind blew, or a rough hand closed upon the tender heart? For a moment, even as his hand held hers, his thoughts wandered from her, from his patient, from all the past, from the present, into the future he dreaded for her—into a future he could not kill—and could not save her from. He dropped her hand suddenly, spoke a few hasty words of farewell, and in a moment he was gone. He kept his word. Conscientiously, and with the utmost devotion, he attended Mr. Brookland through his somewhat tedious illness. When first the old man's half-paralysed senses came back to him, and he observed Paul Wynter at his bed-side, he made no remark, but looked inquiringly at Margaret, who stooped over him, and whispered in his ear all that it was necessary for him to know—that chance had sent Paul to his aid in his sore need. He smiled, lifted his eyes to Paul Wynter's face and raising his thin hand from the coverlet, stretched it towards him.

The doctor and his patient clasped hands and looked into one another's eyes with something of the old friendship; but not a word was spoken on either side. Neither then, nor at any other time, not even to Margaret, did Mr. Brookland make any allusion to the matter. He accepted Paul Wynter's attentions, and his face always lighted up with a smile of welcome when he entered his room—as a patient's will do when the doctor he relies on comes to his bed-side. They had naturally drifted into the position of doctor and patient. The old friendship, the cruel words, the bitter blow that had fallen—at least, on one of them—lay as though forgotten and buried between them. No allusion to it, either directly or indirectly, escaped the lips of either.

Miss Brookland was generally by her father's side when Paul Wynter paid his professional visits, and the usual courtesies passed between them. But as Mr. Brookland's

health progressed, sometimes it happened she would not be there; and as he passed the drawing-room door he would hear her at the piano. He knew her touch, recognised full well the music she was playing, which generally happened to be some of the familiar airs she used to play at Brooklands; and all were more or less associated with the old pleasant days in that brief, bright past. Sometimes he heard the rustling of her dress, or her light step as she went to and fro; but he passed on up to his patient's room. He never ventured to intrude himself upon her, never sought her, even though days rolled on and they did not meet. He wondered if she avoided him purposely? Well, perhaps it was best so—best that they two should never stand face to face, hand to hand, again.

Strangely enough, though Mr. Craig was there every day, often a great part of the day, yet he and Paul Wynter never met. This might have been owing to accident or design, as his visits, being professional, were always paid at stated times, and it was easy for Joel Craig to avoid the meeting, if he so pleased. Once, as Paul was toiling slowly up the street, after a long wearying round, he observed a carriage at Mr. Brookland's door, and lifting his eyes, he saw Margaret descending the steps, leaning on the arm of his enemy. There was no mistaking the handsome face and fine manly figure of Joel Craig. They were evidently good friends, for she turned round, smiled and nodded to him as the carriage drove away; and he walked on quickly in an opposite direction. The carriage drove close to the pavement where Paul was walking—nay, it bespattered him as it passed. But he kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. He would not look up, for the smile which had brightened her face, and fallen upon the man he had good cause to hate, had not had time to fade from her lips. So the tale Margaret Griffith had picked up in the servants' hall was true! He had never really doubted it; but, now that he had seen with his own eyes, the truth seemed assured to him.

Mr. Brookland had been down in the drawing-room for some days. Indeed, he had progressed so far towards convalescence, that the doctor felt the time was fast approaching when he might safely take his leave of him. His visits became less regular, and he no longer confined

himself to any particular time, but considered his own convenience. Mr. Brookland, however, had generally managed to receive him alone. He had before cautioned Margaret that he wished to prevent Mr. Craig and Mr. Wynter meeting.

"Why, papa?" she asked in amazement; "do they know each other? And what can you know about it, dear?"

"I know quite enough to tell me that they are not friends, and are best kept apart," he answered.

Margaret asked no more questions, but she thought and wondered all the more what there had ever been in common between these two?

One morning Mr. Brookland was seated in his easy-chair by the fireside, and Mr. Craig had been amusing him and making him laugh heartily at some odd whimsical story. Margaret had her dainty work-table by her side, strewn with bright-coloured wools and floss silk, which she was busily sorting and putting in order.

"Pray let me assist you," said Joel Craig, turning from father to daughter. "I have a capital eye for colour, and am rather skilful at unravelling a tangled skein."

"I am afraid, if I trust you, you will make bad worse, and 'confusion worse confounded,'" replied Margaret.

"Give me a trial, at least. Come, I do not want to bore you with my assistance," he said, and as he spoke he drew a handful of the gay colours towards him.

"I give you all credit for the best intentions," she said archly; and even as she spoke the door opened, and "Mr. Wynter" was announced.

The blood rushed to his face when he saw who were the occupants of the room. A nervous shiver crept over him, but no one observed that—it was felt, not seen. He saluted Margaret, shook hands with Mr. Brookland, and would have ignored the presence of a third party; but that Mr. Craig would not permit. He rose from his seat, crossed over, and held out his hand to Paul Wynter, saying,—

"We are old acquaintances, I think."

Paul fixed his eye upon him, then turned his head away; he took no notice of the outstretched hand.

"You cannot surely have forgotten me?" said Mr. Craig.

"Forgotten you ! No," replied Paul Wynter, "but I am surprised you should wish to be remembered, and, of all men in the world, remembered by me."

Joel Craig shrugged his shoulders, and returned to Margaret's side.

"Ah ! well," he said, "if you are determined to bear malice, let it be so—but it is all on one side, remember."

Mr. Wynter and Mr. Brookland held a brief conversation together, and then went into another room. It was to be the last professional visit, and there were many slight instructions, and a little last advice to be given, before the doctor and his patient shook hands and parted, each to go his separate way through the world once more.

As soon as Margaret found herself alone with Mr. Craig, she asked him at once,—

"How long have you known Mr. Wynter ? And what do you know about him, or he about you ?"

The bright wool fell in a tangled mass from her hands, and she looked in his face earnestly, awaiting his reply.

"Well," he answered, swaying to and fro in his seat, and stroking his beard, as he always did when he was perplexed, or undecided. "I hardly know what I ought to tell you. The fact is, he and I were good friends once ; but the rupture of our friendship involves the history of another man—a most lamentable history, too, and I don't know how far I should be justified in communicating it to you."

"If this lamentable history you speak of concerns Mr. Wynter's father," exclaimed Margaret, "you need have no scruples, for I know it already ; but I cannot see in what way it is connected with you ?"

"In a very sad way, Miss Brookland," he answered regretfully, "for it has cost me the friendship of the man I loved best in the world. You see how embittered he is against me ; he will not even take my hand."

"Perhaps he thinks he has good cause for rejecting it," said Margaret.

"Well, and perhaps he is right," said Joel Craig, candidly. "The fact is, I was compelled, God knows how unwillingly, to be the chief witness against his father on his trial."

"Ah ! that was terrible !—for you, for him, for all !"

"Yes, and he has never forgiven me. Poor fellow, naturally enough, he takes a romantic view of his father's case; which was, in reality, the mere vulgar crime of forgery, aggravated by its being in connection with a broken trust. He considers me the accessory, if not the cause of his father's ruin; whereas, I was merely an instrument in the hands of the law. Ah! well, there are many sad positions in this world which are unavoidable, and deeply to be regretted."

"Regretted, indeed," said Margaret. "I understand now why it is better you should never meet. Of course he could not take your hand. One could not forgive a blow that has been aimed at one's father, and your blow struck home."

"It was a compulsory blow, and I think I deserve some commiseration, for I lost my friend."

"Ah! yes," replied Margaret; "I am sorry for you, too—I know—at least, I can understand, that it would be very painful to lose Mr. Wynter's friendship, having once enjoyed it."

"It is painful," answered Mr. Craig, "but I have done all I could. Those deformed people always nurse their wrongs, either real or imaginary. They do not know what it is to forget and forgive. It seems as though the devil had given them a crooked soul to match their crooked bodies."

"I do not think Mr. Wynter has given any signs of a crooked soul, but of a most noble and self-sacrificing spirit," said Margaret, warmly. "He may, as you have said, take a romantic view of his father's crime, but surely that may be pardoned; it would be hard indeed if a child's own heart could not find some excuse for even a father's sin! When the whole world is hunting a man down, no matter whether he is guilty or not guilty, you would not have his own son join the hue and cry against him? Why, if it were possible that my father could commit a crime, I believe I should stand up before the face of the whole world, and try to prove that wrong was right—not for the sin, but the dear sinner's sake."

"What a fortunate thing it is that women have no legal responsibilities!" said Mr. Craig. "Why, my dear Miss Brookland, you would elevate crime into a popular science, you defend its partisans so well. If I could rouse such a flush upon your cheek, such music from your lips, I should

be almost inclined to change places with Mr. Wynter, hunchback and all."

"I hate personal remarks," replied Margaret; "they are generally mean, and always spiteful. As for Mr. Wynter's 'hunchback,' as you call it, I have long forgotten to notice it. I only know he is the noblest as well as the most unfortunate man I have ever known."

"Like Desdemona, you see 'Othello's visage in his mind?'"

Mr. Craig had allowed drops of gall to fall from his tongue, and frustrated his own object, which had been to engage all Margaret's sympathy on his own side; and she had sympathised with him in the beginning, but he had ended by driving her over to the enemy. While he was wondering by what means he could regain his lost position, he heard Paul Wynter descend the stairs and the street-door close after him.

"You would like to see us friends?" he said, and he looked in Margaret's face earnestly. "Enough. At any cost, at any risk, I will try to win his friendship back."

He never waited for her to answer, but rushed down the stairs, and followed him into the streets.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SKEIN UNRAVELLED.

“Evil saith to good, ‘My brother
My brother, I am one with thee.’”

AS Paul Wynter was hurrying along across from Curzon Street into Piccadilly, he felt a light touch upon his arm; and on turning round, found himself once more face to face with the very man whom, of all others, he most desired to avoid—Joel Craig—who said, in the coolest way possible,—

“I beg your pardon—I am sorry I startled you. I ought to have remembered that you were a nervous subject.”

Paul Wynter looked quietly down, brushed the sleeve where Joel’s touch had rested, and stepped aside, saying, with as much command as he could assume,—

“If this is your road, pass on.”

“And yours?” inquired Mr. Craig politely.

“Will be exactly in the opposite direction,” replied Paul. “You and I, Joel Craig, cannot walk the same road together; the paths of our feet must be as opposite as our lives.”

“They will at least run parallel for the next half hour,” interrupted Mr. Craig.

“With my own good will,” resumed Paul, “I would never have seen your face or heard your cruel voice again. I would have put the seas between us if I could.”

“That might easily have been managed,” said Craig, interrupting him again. “A trip to Boulogne would have

settled that, and I should never have taken the trouble to follow you there, Paul."

"Why have you followed me now?" he answered fiercely. "Why will you thrust your company upon a man who has so much cause to despise—to hate you?"

"Ah! now you are coming to the point. Those are the first sensible words I have heard you utter," said Mr. Craig. "You saw how pleasantly I was engaged at our friend Brookland's?—and of course I should not have torn myself from such a pleasant fireside and charming company for nothing. The fact is, I want to have a little comfortable confidential chat with you." As he was speaking, he took out his cigar-case, saying, "You will excuse me lighting my cigar? You do not object to smoke?"

"No, nor to fire either—if you were in it," answered Paul, as he walked on hurriedly, Joel Craig following at his heels, puffing away quietly at his cigar.

"Take it easy, pray," he said. "If you hurry through life at this pace, you will soon be at the end of your journey."

Paul stopped suddenly.

"Go your way, and leave me to go mine," he said. "There can be nothing in common between us two. I have nothing to say to you—you can have nothing to say to me."

"There you are mistaken. I have many things to say to you. Whether you will like to hear them is quite a different matter."

"I will not ——" began Paul.

"You must. Come, it is no use jibbing like a restive horse. If the devil himself stood between us, I would speak all the same," said Mr. Craig. "I am not surprised, though, that you should wish to avoid me. It was rather cowardly of you to stab me in the back, though it was only with pen, ink, and paper."

"You allude to my letter to Mr. Brookland? Then you have seen it?" said Paul, quickly.

"Of course I have seen it. Mr. Brookland and I are very good friends," he added, emphatically; "and, considering our positions, it is well we should be. But it was hardly fair for you to try and sow dissensions between us."

"Fair!" repeated Paul. "When I see a wolf in sheep's clothing, I think it is my duty to unmask him, that he may be hunted from all honest homes, like the rogue and pitiful impostor he is."

"Not a bad idea that, but not new, and by no means complimentary to me," said Mr. Craig, interrupting him.

"I have tried to unmask you," continued Paul, "and I shall try again. If I fail, it shall be no fault of mine. I will not stand by and see you bring disgrace upon the home of a pure and honourable man."

"Had not you better say 'lady?' That lies nearest to your heart."

"And farthest from my lips, when I speak to you!" replied Paul. "Come, say what you have got to say, and have done. Your coolness sickens and surprises me."

"Oh! my coolness need not astonish you. I was always a cool hand remember, while you were always too easily excited. But really, regarding you as a reasoning individual, I cannot see what I have done to raise your choler now."

"My 'choler,' as you call it, has never once gone down since you and I stood face to face together. *You* to bear witness against *your* friend—*my* father—and I ——"

"You had better leave your exploit unchronicled," said Mr. Craig, interrupting him, "since it was unsuccessful. After all, in that matter, which was quite a legal affair, I do not see you have any right to complain of me or of my doings."

"No right to complain of your treachery, lying, and false swearing, that have disgraced my father's grey hairs, and will send him dishonoured to the grave? I say nothing of the wrongs you have done to me. You have robbed me of name, fame, and station."

"I deny that. Your ruin followed you father's, as a necessary consequence. Your prayer-book ought to have taught you that the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children. Not that I should have objected to ruin you, mind—quite the reverse; but that bit of business fate has transacted, not I. There, do not begin again—it is no use pelting me with hard words; and however agreeable it may be to you to accuse me of such amiable vices as false swearing, etc., as you could not prove it to the satisfaction

of a British jury, you can hardly expect to prove it satisfactorily to me. But the fact is, it was upon this very matter I intended to speak to you." He lowered his voice as he added—"I mean to make a clean breast of it. I may choose to confess to *you* what I denied to them."

"You can confess nothing to me that I do not already know," said Paul Wynter. "My father has told me everything."

"Not everything," replied Mr. Craig, with a sardonic smile. "I think there are some small matters between us that he would not discuss with you."

His words, accompanied by such a look, seemed ominous to Paul Wynter. His heart sank within his breast. What was there to tell? Could there be anything more terrible than he knew already? He walked silently now by the side of Mr. Craig, who he knew had enjoyed his unfortunate father's fullest confidence, and was, indeed, part steward, part adviser, and friend. Mr. Craig led the way into the Green Park, which was now grey with the grim November mists, and almost deserted.

"We can have a little quiet talk here," he said—"people do not come pleasure-seeking such weather as this."

He knocked the dead grey ashes from his cigar, and look moodily upon the ground. Paul Wynter was the first to speak,—

"Well," he said, "you were going to make a clean breast of it—pray begin the process; the operation will not, I am sure, be an agreeable one, and the sooner it is over the better. My time is valuable—it is not my own, Mr. Craig."

"Time was when it was 'Joel' and 'Paul' between us two—have you forgotten that?"

"I have forgotten everything," he answered sternly, "except this: that you have brought a curse upon the home that sheltered you—have stung the hand that gave you bread. I know all. You watched my father drifting into a terrible strait, urged him on, prompted the deed, and then bore witness against him! He trusted you, and you betrayed him!"

"Tit for tat!" exclaimed Joel Craig, laying a grasp of iron upon his arm and glaring with hot flaming eyes into

his face. "My mother trusted *him*, and he betrayed *her* !

"You are mad !" exclaimed Paul Wynter, shaking him off. "You invent a slanderous lie to cover a motiveless villany !"

"Not motiveless !" exclaimed Joel Craig, his coolness deserting him, his face livid with suppressed rage. "I had a motive, a brave one, and it has answered well. Your father is mine ! Ask him—he will not deny it. The law recognised you as his heir, while I, the eldest born, was cast out. *You* ruled—I served. You bore an honourable name—your father's—I a degraded one—my mother's ! I swore a day should come when you should blush for yours, as I have blushed for mine. For years and years I waited, and I have kept my word !"

It would be almost impossible to describe the faces, or the feelings of those two men as they sat in the thickening mist of the November fog. Joel Craig was white—no, not white, livid with the bitter black hatred that surged up from his heart, and Paul Wynter's wide-open eyes were fixed with a terrible find of fascination upon him. Every accent—every word he had spoken was freighted with the solemn weight of a terrible truth, that sank at once into Paul Wynter's heart, and filled it with a new agony—not with the old shame for his father's guilt ; *that* had settled into a dull, aching pain that pulsed with every throb of life, but this he had learned to bear. Every nerve seemed palpitating with a new grief, a new shame. Joel Craig's communication had taken his senses by storm, and set his thoughts into a state of bewildering motion. He could see nothing distinctly but the man before him—he could think of nothing distinctly at that moment. The one thought only was clear—that this man was sinned against as well as sinning—ay, sinned against before he was born ! He could have pitied him then. He knew, from his own experience, too well how bitter it was to blush for a father's guilt, but he felt it must be even more bitter to blush for a mother's shame. But, surging quickly up over the one feeling of sympathy, came the memory of the revenge—so terrible, so overwhelming, that had swept away the best and brightest part of his own life with the wreck of his father's name, fame, and fortune.

The words of the Scripture rose up in his heart, and half unconsciously fell from his lips,—

“‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord—I will repay.’”

“Ay, but I chose to pay in my own coin, and in my own way!” exclaimed Mr. Craig. “I am not sure that God Almighty’s vengeance would have suited me, remember that.”

His short bitter laugh struck discordantly upon Paul Wynter’s ear.

“You have taken the law of justice and right into your own hands,” he said, “and smothered all sympathy, and ignored your claim to commiseration. Yours has been the work of a fiend! You have sat at my father’s table—I will not say ‘our’ father’s table,” he added, indignantly rejecting Joel Craig’s amendment—“eaten his bread, been sheltered beneath his roof, have clasped his hand, smiled in his eyes, crept into his heart, and there, spider-like, wove your web that was to entangle our lives, and kill the honour of an honourable house! You were seized by no sudden anger—no gust of passion. You arranged and ripened your cruel scheme through long, long years; for I remember you as long as I remember anything. You have carried me when I was a child; I have clung to your neck, and—you were the hero of my childhood, Joel Craig! Surely, then, when you were a brave, bright boy, things were different? You could not always have been so base-hearted?”

A peculiar smile crept over Joel Craig’s face, as he said,—

“Your allusion to the old times brings many things back to my mind. Yes, I did carry you when you were a child, and a fine hearty lithe-limbed urchin you were. Your mother was very proud of you; until, one day, I had an accident, and let you fall. Your spine was injured, they said,” he touched Paul Wynter’s deformed shoulder as he spoke, “and for months you were in your bed—and you were never a lithe-limbed, brave-looking child again. It was an *accident*”—he dwelt upon the word—“and you dwindled away until you became a very pining thing. It needed all your mother’s love and care to rear you—they say it almost broke her heart.”

“O God, this is hard to bear!” exclaimed Paul Wynter,

his whole frame quivering with strong emotion, "and I have sworn I would not lift my hand against you!"

"It is lucky for you," exclaimed Joel Craig, shaking out his stout strong limbs. "My sinews are like whipcords, and my muscles like steel! I could crush such a fragile thing as you as easily as I would a fly!"

"I do not envy you your boasted strength," said Paul, gazing steadily at him; "even if I could, I would not change places with you. I would rather be what I am—what you have helped to make me. Not for all the riches, and honour, and proud prosperity this world can crowd into a man's life, would I have your sin upon my soul. My father's crime, that has seemed so heavy, is light compared with your cruel and unnatural wickedness! I would rather be by his side, breaking stones in the prison-yard, with the brand of infamy upon my brow, than walk about like you, with the brand of God upon my naked soul!" He rose from his seat, adding, "I have heard enough—too much—we will part here, and I heartily pray our paths may never cross again."

"And yet you have crossed mine," exclaimed Joel Craig, furiously; "crossed it in a way I am not likely to forget. It is the old story of the 'Fox and the Grapes.' You can have no hope, no chance of winning the prize yourself, and yet you grudge it to another."

"I grudge no prize to any man who wins it fairly. The prize you allude to is Miss Brookland," he forced himself unwillingly to speak her name. "As you say, I had never a thought, never a chance of winning her; and yet I would lay down my life to save her from you. I would rather know her fair head was shrouded and pillowed in her coffin, than in your arms. Young, pure, beautiful as she is, it would be better, far better for her to share the corruption of the grave, than be dragged down to the worse corruption of your life."

"There is no accounting for tastes, and she thinks differently," said Joel Craig, with a coolness that was far more irritating than anger.

"She does not know you," rejoined Paul. "If she could see you with my eyes—see you as you are, she would abhor and despise you. as I do."

"Which, luckily, she will never do," he answered. "A woman always looks upon the man she loves with her own eyes, and sees him exactly as she wishes to see him, and in no other way. If you were to go straight back to Curzon Street now, and repeat all that I have told you here, who would believe you? Your statement would be put down to envy, jealousy, any madness but the *truth*. But this is child's play—you cannot alter my position with the Brooklands. The more you try to displace me, the more firmly rooted I shall stand."

Paul Wynter looked silently upon the ground for a moment, and then said,—

"You have me at a disadvantage now, I own; but it will not be always so. God will let me stand upon the vantage ground one day. Meanwhile, I will watch and wait—wait so patiently, and watch so well! Is all said now?"

"No, not all!" exclaimed Joel Craig; and the dark expression came back and settled on his face. "We have turned aside from our subject. You are amazed at my hatred of you and yours, and would like to know how and when I first felt this thirst for vengeance? Good! I will tell you, though I must drag things and thoughts to light that have never passed my lips—never; but have lain all these years festering in my heart. You remember Treherne? But I need not ask—of course you remember it. The old house, with its quaint gables, and stately marble terrace, where the peacocks came to feed, and the grand beech-trees, with your mother's favourite seat beneath their spreading branches, looking down through the meadows to the smooth green lake beyond. I want you to follow me, and see it with my eyes, as it was when I first beheld it. I was a child, about eight or nine years old. It was a bright spring morning, and the place lay bathed in the pleasant sunshine, the rooks cawing their melancholy caw caw over-head. I had been trotting along a dusty road, miles and miles, it seems to me, by my mother's side, a tall, fair, fragile-looking woman. I think I can see her now. God help her! The bells were ringing merrily, there was a stir and bustle everywhere, and crowds of the villagers were trooping through the green lanes and thronging round the church doors. There was a general hum and buzz—expectation—it was

your father's wedding-day, and he came out of the doors smiling and proud and happy, with his bride upon his arm. My mother stood by my side, clutching my hand tight, with a white, frozen look upon her face. I broke from her—I had not seen him for a long, long time, but I recognised him at once, and called him by the name I had been taught to call him—'Father!' I shall never forget his look, nor the touch of his hand as he thrust me aside. I know I was dragged away, and the wedding procession passed on. I gaped after it, angry, bewildered, yet, child-like, amused by the novelty of all I saw. When I looked round for my mother, she was lost in the crowd. I wandered about in search of her. Presently I saw crowds of people hurrying towards the lake. I followed after them, and arrived in time to see the woman who bore me, who had clasped me in her arms, and rained soft kisses on my cheeks, taken from the water, dripping!—drowned!—dead! I can see her now, as they wrung the water from her long, fair hair, and dragged her across the meadows, through the stable-yard into an outhouse, and laid her upon the ground; and she who had lain in the bridegroom's arms, lay there, cold, stark, and dead! While he was feasting with his wedding guests, bowing, smiling, making and hearing fine speeches; drinking and proposing healths—"Prosperity to the bride and bridegroom!" there was no one to care for me, waif and stray that I was. I crouched by my mother's side. Her wet hair clung to me, her clothes dripped over and drenched me through, and baptized the hatred that had sprung up in my heart within that hour!"

The cold dew stood upon his forehead, and his whole soul seemed racked with the remembered agony of that "long ago." All the long years that had passed since then seemed to have rolled away, and left it bare and naked before his eyes; and he saw his drowned mother's face now as plainly as he saw it then. As he spoke of her and her lost, despairing life, his lip quivered, and broken sobs and bitter words nigh choked him. So this man, without a heart, had one vulnerable point, at least, for he broke down utterly. Paul Wynter laid his hand gently upon him; for his life, in spite of his own wrongs and sufferings, and this man's cruelty and crimes, he could not help sympathising

with and pitying him. His whole life, from the beginning, seemed to have grown awry. It had been twisted, distorted, and penned for evil from the moment it had branched off from his drowned mother's breast. From the pure love of a dead mother, was born the hatred to a living father. Scattered groups of men and women passed hurriedly by them, little heeding or knowing of the tragic drama that the lives of those two men were silently playing out. Paul Wynter said nothing. What could he say? He feared lest any words that he might speak should aggravate this man's irremediable grief, that even time, that soothes all things, had failed to temper down. When Joel Craig raised his head again, his face looked haggard, and his lips white. He smiled a ghastly smile, and said,—

"I am not often seized with a fit like this. It soon passes away." He paused a second, then added, "You have heard that men's hair have been known to turn grey with grief in a single night?—well, young as I was, my blood turned to gall in a single hour; and it has grown more and more bitter every hour of my life. I do not pretend to be a Christian. I have returned evil for evil, as I swore I would, and again I say, I have kept my word!"

He rose up quickly, and disappeared rapidly in the damp dingy fog. Paul Wynter sat gazing blankly after him long after the weird atmosphere had shrouded him from his sight, his senses and his limbs alike paralyzed by the terrible story he had heard.





CHAPTER XXXV.

RESTITUTION.

“Time at last makes all things even.”

PAUL WYNTER could not shake off the impression Joel Craig's terrible story had made upon him. So many, many things flashed upon his memory; small, insignificant matters, that had made no impression whatever at the time, came forcibly to his mind now. He remembered the particular outhouse that Joel had alluded to; they used to store wood and agricultural lumber there. When he was a child, they used often to play at hide-and-seek, and sometimes Paul hid himself in the half-ruined outhouse, but he was never found. Joel never sought for him *there*, and Paul had often wondered why he avoided it; but now he wondered no more. He understood that, and other things which had once galled and surprised him. He could comprehend now, why his father had always shown so much favour to Joel Craig, whose boisterous spirits, great animal strength, and fine handsome figure and face formed such a striking contrast to himself, the shy studious son and heir. Mr. Treherne had been fond of patronising all kinds of athletic sports, when he was no longer able to take an active part in them, and Joel Craig had been always famous at such games. He could run, leap, row, carry heavy weights upon a single finger—indeed he could do anything that youth, strength, and spirit, was able to accomplish; while poor Paul, the fragile delicate

boy, could only creep out into the sunshine and bury himself in his books, and gather the knowledge, learn the endurance, that stood him in such good stead now that he was a man. He had always felt that the misfortune which should have drawn him nearer to his father's heart had driven him further from it. The Trehernes had always been a handsome race, and the old man was galled and mortified that his son, the heir of his house, should differ so widely from his fathers. How terrible the contrast between then and now! Then he had been the heir to a good estate and an honourable name; now he was heir to nothing! His inheritance had dwindled away into a blurred and blotted record of his father's crime.

As he pondered on the past and the present, he felt sick at heart, world-weary, tired of stirring, tired of living, tired of everything. He passed by a funeral on his way homeward. Women and children followed the dead man in tears and lamentations, as though there were no worse things in the world than death to bear. He sighed as he passed on, and thought how willingly, if he could, he would have given them back their dead, and taken his place, and lain there shrouded and at rest. From himself and his own troubles, his thoughts flew to Margaret Brookland. His heart bled for her. If she really loved Joel Craig and had engaged herself to marry him—as, from what Paul had heard and seen, seemed only too probable—he could do nothing to save her. He had already written to Mr. Brookland, but his warning had evidently been treated with indifference, perhaps contempt. Now, he could neither speak nor act in the matter; chance must rule all. It seemed as though Joel Craig's communication had tied his hands and put a seal upon his lips.

The next day, when he went to pay his usual visit to the prison, he sought and found an opportunity of speaking to his father when he was alone in his cell.

"I saw some one yesterday, father," he said, looking at him narrowly as he spoke—"someone who has injured you and me, and whom I hoped never to see again."

"Joel!" exclaimed the old man, peering eagerly into his face.

"Yes," he answered with solemnity. "I have often

wondered why he hated us, why he conspired to ruin and disgrace us. I know now. He has told me a terrible story, about—about a drowned woman!—his mother! O God! father is it true?”

“Hush!” exclaimed the old man, clutching him by the arm and looking fearfully round the room. “Do not speak of that here, Paul—I have seen her often since then! Sometimes I see her now, here, wringing her wet hair by my bedside!” He paused a moment, and covered his face. Then he looked up appealingly in Paul’s face. “I tried to do my duty by the boy; you know I did. I was fond of him, Paul—fonder than I was of you. He was so handsome and strong. It is very hard upon me now; everything seems to go wrong.”

“Yes, one wrong makes many,” said Paul.

“But it was thirty years ago, Paul, and that is a long, long time. In thirty years, so many things may be buried and forgotten.” He spoke in a querulous, injured tone; as though neither God nor man had any right to remember the sin when he had forgotten it. “It was all past and buried thirty years ago,” he moaned.

“We cannot bury our sins, father, as we bury our dead,” replied Paul sadly. “We may put it out of the world’s sight, lay it deep in a grave, throw the dust of years over it, tread it down, and hide it from all eyes; but though it is buried, it is not dead. A resurrection time is sure to come, when it will rise up and take a new shape, a new name, and strike as it has stricken now.”

“It is very hard and cruel of you to throw all these things in my face, now that I am an old man and in trouble, Paul.” He lowered his voice, and crouched closer to his son’s side; adding, “And you know I am alone here, and all night in the dark.”

He had never been a strong-minded man, and the shock of his sudden fall and subsequent imprisonment had not only enfeebled his health, but weakened his intellect. Who could tell what thoughts and fears tortured him, when he was alone in the dark he seemed so to dread?

Paul Wynter drew the grey head kindly to his breast, and spoke to him soothingly, and tried to quiet his agitation.

“I do not want to reproach you,” he said. “God knows

you have enough to bear. I only want you—I want us both to think more pityingly of *him*. I acknowledge that his revenge has been most cruel—but his provocation was great. I have been deeply embittered against him—have hated him heartily, and would have rejoiced to see any evil overtake him. I am changed now, and with all my heart can say, ‘God forgive him!’—and, father, I never thought I could say ‘God forgive the man who brought you here!’”

“Ay, ay,” replied the old man irritably; “it is all very well for people to talk of forgiving, who have never been injured. He has done no harm to you—it is me he has injured. If you were locked up here, imprisoned and disgraced, you would not find it quite so easy to forgive. I was his best friend, too, and was always very kind to him.” He was silent a moment, and then added, “I thought he had forgotten all about that dreadful day, for he never called me ‘father’ afterwards. He was so young, I believed he had forgotten everything. Then he was always so free and pleasant in his ways!—how could I think he was bearing malice all these long, long years? But it is a wicked world, Paul, a very wicked world. If it was not for you, I should not care how soon I was out of it. You are a good son, my boy—better than I deserve—and you are all I have got in the world. Are you sure you will never get tired of this prison life? Sometimes I think things are very hard on you too.”

“Do not trouble about me!” exclaimed Paul, trying to brighten up; “and rest assured I shall never get tired so long as *you* are here, father. I would come and see your oftener, if I could, but I am afraid to pay you too much attention, lest it should rouse suspicion, and then we should be separated entirely. I am afraid I have been here too long now.”

“Come to me as often as you can, my boy,” replied the old man, clinging to his arm and following him to the door, “and try to look cheerful, and tell me news I should like to hear. And do not talk any more—do not think any more of those horrible things that happened so long ago. The present is quite bad enough, without talking of the past—that can never be remedied now. Shall you see Joel again, Paul?”

"I hope not—I pray not!" he said fervently.

"Well, well, if you do, just tell him—but there—no—best tell him nothing." And so they parted.

Paul Wynter was so accustomed to his father's varying moods, that they ceased to wound or pain him. Sometimes the old man was full of grateful affection, and seemed fully to appreciate his son's devotion; at others he was querulous and thankless, full of himself and his own troubles. But Paul never relaxed in his attention; he made every allowance for these shifting moods, and never retorted at the most ungenerous speech. If he was hurt one moment, he recovered himself the next.

The remainder of that day he was very much occupied. He had so many poor patients to attend to, that it was late in the afternoon when he got home, where a pleasant surprise awaited him. He found Dr. Chapman there, cosily installed in a comfortable arm-chair, before a blazing fire, with the *Times* newspaper in his hand. It was some time since they had met, and Paul was rejoiced to see him. There was something in his stout, breezy nature that seemed to clear the dull atmosphere of Paul Wynter's monotonous life. The Doctor's cheerful presence refreshed and invigorated his spirit, as the waves of the sea refresh and invigorate the tired limbs of a travel-stained man, washing away the dust of the world, and giving new strength to his muscles, new vigour to his soul.

"This is indeed a delightful surprise," said Paul, shaking him warmly by the hand. "Like the welcome swallows, you are sure to bring with you a promise of the spring."

"There is many a true word spoken in jest," replied the doctor, returning his greeting heartily; "and your poetical allusion to the swallow is by no means out of place. I think I have brought you a promise of the spring."

"You do more than that—you bring it with you," replied Paul. "I suppose you have not dined yet, and would not care to join me in the primitive luxury of tea-drinking?"

"Indeed I shall be very glad to accept your hospitality in any way, even if it takes the form of a tea-pot. But you do not ask me what my news is. You do not seem at all impatient to hear it."

Paul looked gratefully in his face, as he answered,—

"I am afraid, old friend, you have been making another useless effort to serve me. Useless, because I shall never be able to avail myself of your kindness."

"Humph!" grunted the doctor. "But it is somebody else who is making an effort now. Have you seen the paper to-day?"

Paul acknowledged he had not.

"Of course you have not," rejoined Dr. Chapman. "You never see anything you ought to see. I never saw a fellow so blind to his own interests as you are."

"But I do not expect to find my interest buried in the columns of the *Times*," replied Paul, laughing at his earnestness.

"Well, then, listen to this." And the doctor read aloud the following advertisement—"If Paul Augustus Treherne, late of Treherne Manor, near Penzance, Cornwall, will call at the office of Messrs. Digby and Bland, Solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn, he will hear of something to his advantage.' There," he continued, slapping the paper down upon the table. "Are you Paul Augustus Treherne, or are you not?"

"I certainly am," he answered. "But the advertisement puzzles me. I cannot think what there is in this world that can be to my advantage now."

"There, that is what I call rank rebellion," replied Dr. Chapman. "A wicked flying in the face of Providence. How do you know what light may be shining behind the cloud?"

"We shall soon find out," he answered, glancing his eye over the paper. "It is too late to see about it to-day; but to-morrow ——"

"Of course, to-morrow we will see about it," said Dr. Chapman; "and I will meet you there. I wonder what it can mean? I suppose you have no idea, cannot guess, eh?"

"Not in the least."

"You have no relations, Paul?" he added, curiously.

"None who would take the trouble to seek me out, even for my advantage," he answered, and there was a slight bitterness in his tone. "Do not you know that when things go wrong with a man, and he is disgraced, guilty or not guilty, his relatives are the first to condemn and fall from

him? His friends will often cling to him, when brother falls from brother. At least, that is my experience. Since our troubles our relatives have forgotten us, or, at least, so far as they can forget, as completely as though we had dropped out of the world. It is strange though, doctor, the names of Digby and Bland are familiar to me. I cannot think where I have heard them."

"I know nothing about them, thank God," said his friend, piously. "I do not understand natural history, but I have heard a lawyer described as 'a bird of ill omen, celebrated chiefly for the length of its bill!' Ah! ah! that is not my joke, Paul, but it is a very good one, nevertheless."

"Ah! I know," exclaimed Paul, who had been racking his memory while Dr. Chapman was speaking. "I remember now. I met Mr. Digby one day at dinner at Brooklands. I think he is Mr. Brookland's man of business."

"Eh!" rejoined the doctor, evidently in some surprise. "Why, what have you been about there? It surely cannot be your old friends advertising for you?"

"Impossible," he answered; "they know my address, and even if they did not, they would never call me by the name I have disowned."

The doctor kept speculating wildly upon all kinds of things as possible and probable in connection with the advertisement, and altogether they had a very merry tea-drinking. He declared he had never tasted such delicious muffins since he had left Harrow, where he toasted the muffins, and sometimes got licked with the toasting-fork.

"I always do whatever I can in the way of toasting and tea-making myself," said Paul. "I cannot bear the grimy hands of a slavey in a house like this, to touch anything I am going to eat. That is where I miss little Margaret Griffiths, she was so dainty and clean in all her ways, good-tempered and obliging, too, where I was concerned."

"Ah!" said the doctor knowingly, "it was a very good thing you got rid of that precocious young lady, Master Paul; you would have had her falling in love with you by-and-by. I am not sure but that she was a little on the way before she left you."

"What! poor little Margaret? A mere child! Absurd," he answered, smiling at the idea.

Before they parted, it was arranged that they should meet the next day at two o'clock, as that would be the most convenient hour for Paul. Punctually at the hour appointed, he made his appearance at the place of rendezvous ; but the doctor was there before him, pacing up and down before the solicitor's door like a sentinel, watching all goers in, and comers out, feeling a queer sort of interest in every one who went into the office ; having a vague idea that some false representative of Paul Augustus Treherne might make his appearance there. However, his veritable friend Paul soon joined him, and they went together into the office of Messrs. Digby and Wyatt, and were at once ushered into the lawyer's presence.

Mr. Digby, a middle-aged portly gentleman, recognised Paul at once. They had had a pleasant walk and talk in the beautiful grounds at Brooklands, and imagining he had come to pay a visit of courtesy, as he had been invited to do, the lawyer greeted him heartily ; but he was soon undeceived. The friendly gleam faded from his eyes, and a shrewd business look crept into his face as Paul showed him the advertisement, and told him he was the person specified.

"But I thought your name was Wynter?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"I have chosen to call myself Wynter," he said, "for reasons which I need not specify here. But I am in reality Paul Augustus Treherne, for whom you have advertised. I have brought a certificate of my birth, my parents' marriage, and some other family papers with me—here they are." He took a packet of papers from his breast pocket, and laid them on the table. "I think you will find there sufficient evidence to show that I am really the man I represent myself to be. If you require further proof, I daresay I shall be able to give it you ; though in doing so I may be forced to speak of some painful matters on which I would rather keep silence."

"Enough, Sir, enough!" said Mr. Digby. "I understand it all. I have heard the whole of your melancholy story, and —" he felt embarrassed, as though he was treading on delicate ground, and was afraid of saying too much, yet anxious not to say too little. So he acted discreetly,

and did not allude to the subject, except, perhaps, indirectly, as he added, "And I feel it is an honour and a privilege to be allowed to shake you by the hand, Sir." And while he was speaking he shook it so warmly, Paul thought he never meant to let it go. Dr. Chapman's face beamed brightly as he glanced from one to the other.

"Ay, ay!" he said, "and the more you know of him, the greater honour you'll find it. I feel as if I, indeed as if everybody, ought to be grateful to human nature for giving us such a specimen of her best work. She has put the right sort of stuff into him. I only wish she had been more liberal to the rest of the world generally."

Paul smiled with grateful affection on him as he answered,—

"If you wish to rate me at my true worth, you must turn a deaf ear to my friend's valuation. Robins himself could hardly colour more highly, or appraise a poor property at a higher rate than that at which my friend here estimates me. But about the advertisement, Mr. Digby. I should like to know by whose desire you have advertised for me; and in what way it will be to my advantage?"

"Well, I think I can easily satisfy you in a very few words," replied the lawyer. "It is a lady who has desired me to advertise for you—a lady who is sick and dying—my client, Miss Blanche Eversleigh."

"Blanche Eversleigh dying!" repeated Paul, inexpressibly shocked.

"She sent for me a few days back," continued Mr. Digby, "to take instructions for making her will. She talked to me a great deal about you and your family misfortunes. For a long time she has wished to see you, but has been dissuaded from taking any active steps to discover your whereabouts. Now that she is dying, she has determined to act for herself. She desires me, in the first place, to assure you that the proceedings against your father were not taken at her instigation —"

"I know—I know that," said Paul quickly; "it was not her doing, of course; it was the law, she could not control that. I have never for a moment thought otherwise."

"I am desired, moreover, to state that she has always been deeply sensible of, and has thoroughly appreciated the

honourable spirit that actuated you in the noble sacrifice of your entire fortune, in order to shield, as far as possible, your father's good name, and repair his error; and to mark her esteem for you, especially in this matter, she has desired me to make a transfer, or re-transfer, of your entire fortune to you, its original possessor. And I congratulate you, Mr. Treherne, with all my heart, upon your good fortune."

Paul Wynter had sat down and leaned his head upon his hand, apparently overwhelmed by the lawyer's revelations. He was not thinking so much of the fortune itself, as of the noble-hearted woman who, in the midst of the pains and the fears of death, had roused courage enough for such an act of restitution. He remembered little more of the interview between himself and Mr. Digby. He answered when spoken to, but asked no questions. Dr. Chapman did the best part of the talking; and when the interview was brought to an end, Paul Wynter was glad to find himself in the streets once more, with the cold, frosty air blowing into his face. The doctor burst into a rhapsody of admiration of Blanche Eversleigh's appreciative powers, and overpowered Paul with his boisterous congratulations.

"Thirty thousand pounds, my dear boy!" he exclaimed. "Why, it is a splendid fortune! You will find a golden key now to all your difficulties."

"It comes too late," replied Paul. "It will not open my father's prison doors. It will not buy back our good name; nor cleanse the stain he has left upon it."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the doctor. "You, of the old stock, are morbidly sensitive on points of honour. I tell you one thing, Master Paul, and all the world will agree with me—you have done more to purify your name than he has done to soil it. If he has disgraced human nature, you have ennobled it! God bless you, my dear boy!—God bless you!"



CHAPTER XXXVI.

CLAUDE'S SUNSET.

“Oh, sweet and strange it seems to me that ere this day is done,
The voice that now is speaking may be beyond the sun,
For ever and for ever with those just souls and true—
And what is life that we should moan? why make we such ado?”

THE night was stormy and dark, blowing a perfect hurricane at sea. As Claude Nutford lay in his bed in his quiet Cornish home, he could hear the wild waves roaring and lashing along the shore; and the howling wind seemed to be clashing against the angry waters, now and then bursting into loud sobs, or low wailing sighs, as though it had been cruelly beaten. All was so tempestuous without, so still and peaceful within. A bright wood fire, which was never allowed to go down by night or by day, was burning in the grate, the crickets chirped merrily on the hearth, and he could hear the tick-ticking of the great old clock in the kitchen hard by. It had struck ten when he came into the world, and he wondered what hour it would strike when he went out of it.

It was such a wise old clock, and told many other things besides the hour of the day. It pointed out the months of the year, and the days of the week, and it knew when it was going to rain, and when there was a prospect of fair weather; and Time himself, in the shape of an old man with a scythe

in his hand, used to come out at mid-day and midnight, and look round, to see if there was any work for him to do.

During the years of his childhood, Claude used to fancy there was some mysterious power or powers hidden in the dark mahogany case, for his father used to consult it before he cut his hay, and while his crops were growing. The child wondered where all its knowledge came from, and if the iron tongue, that said only "tick, tick," to his ears, had some other language for older and wiser people. It had kept its place in the kitchen corner, and gone on telling the same monotonous tale to generations of Nutfords. Its great bronzed face had looked on many changing scenes, and gathered the family secrets that had been whispered round the fireside. No clock in all Cornwall had so much meaning in its face ; it seemed to insinuate that it could do so much more if it chose—it could run on and strike the hours faster than they flew, and perhaps overtake even Time itself ; but it chose to go on ticking and striking in the old slow, sensible way. Claude had outgrown all his childish fancies years ago, but this night they came thickening upon his memory ; the old thoughts crept out from some dark corner of his brain, and played strange antics with his restless senses.

The old familiar sound of the pendulum swaying to and fro seemed louder, and to mean so much more, now that the rest of the household was sleeping. It was like a death-watch, meant only for his soul to hear ; and when it struck, and he knew the old man would be coming out with his scythe to look round and see if there was any one to be cut down, he cowered under the bed-clothes to hide himself. But he smiled at his folly the next minute, and tried to turn a deaf ear to its monotonous tick, and listen to the storm that was raging without. The angry struggle between the wind and the waves reminded him of the struggle between life and death that was going on within him. It was a labour for him to breathe—a labour for him to live now—and he knew the end could not be far off. He lay thinking, not grieving—thinking of the old busy days, teeming with ambition, swarming with hopes, and filled with the rich full sound of life—it was all still now, and it seemed so strange that he had come home to die !

He thought of all he had done, and all he meant to do in the future—the future that was never to come. Memories of the world of art he had lived in, with its dreams of beauty and ideal loveliness, came crowding upon his brain. He closed his eyes, that he might indulge in the brief, bright joy of retrospection, undisturbed by sights and sounds of actual life. His mind was full of confused and broken pictures of the things he had seen and delighted in. Classic heroes, sublime in their severe, sculptured beauty, and blooming women, in their bright-coloured, soft, flowing drapery, seemed to be passing in and out—coming and going through the secret chambers of his brain. Among them was one that he had himself created, with golden hair and soft sweet eyes, and she stayed longer than the rest. She was more palpable and real; she seemed to lay her soft hands upon his brow, to close his eyes, and still his brain. Slowly all things faded away, and he slept.

When he awoke it was morning. The wild, gusty night had worn itself out, and after the first cold grey gleams of day, there was a flush of crimson in the sky, and slowly the grand sun rose, breaking through rugged cloud-mountains, driving them in broken, tumbling masses before him. The first thing, when he opened his eyes, he saw Lucy bending over him, and as she stooped to kiss him, she said, with tender affection,—

“You are better this morning, dear, are you not?”

He smiled, and pressed her hand in answer, but did not speak. He could not talk much—it distressed him so. He did not suffer much pain now, except when he coughed; but he was so weak, he had hardly power to move. He could not have got up and walked to the end of the garden-path, if it had been to save his life. He was lying in the large parlour, where Mr. Brookland and Margaret had taken tea, and admired his sketches on the walls. He liked to be down on the ground-floor, because he could hear, and sometimes see, the household going about their duties; or catch a glimpse of his father as he worked in the garden, or superintended his labourers in the distant fields. He was greatly changed since Paul Wynter had bid “God bless him!” as he started in the train for Cornwall. He was literally wearing away; every hour, every moment was

stealing away the essence of life, and sowing the seeds of decay. His hands were transparent—they could not have held the pencil now; and his face was so thin and waxen white, that his large beautiful eyes looked doubly large, doubly bright, and his soft luxuriant curls were more abundant than ever.

There was no mistaking the fact that he was dying, dying in the fulness of youth, when life was at its brightest, and his genius rich in bloom, and full of promise. Truly had he “come up as a flower to be cut down like grass.” When the whole household was saddened with gloomy forebodings, while his father and sister were breaking their hearts for him, he alone was cheerful, sometimes even gay. Lucy lifted her eyes, and saw the old man standing in the doorway, with such a grave, grieved look upon his face! He was always a man of few words, now he spoke less than ever. He went about his business in a dull, absent kind of way; his great grief seemed to have paralysed his powers of speech, and quickened his power of feeling. Sometimes he would creep into the room while the boy was sleeping, and gaze upon him, with clasped hands, and such a look of dumb, poignant anguish in his eyes, that no words could have uttered. His great heart was full even to breaking, and he would creep noiselessly away and sit in the chimney corner, bury his face in his hands, and groan aloud. He seemed to wish to hide himself and his grief, as though it was too sacred for indifferent eyes to look upon, even for pity’s sake. He was always hovering about the boy, and yet did not like his watchfulness to be noticed, even by the sufferer himself. Twenty times in the day the old grey head might be seen peering in at the closed casement, or at the open door; and he would go away without speaking a word. So he would have stolen away now, but following the direction of Lucy’s eyes, Claude saw him, and smiled, and motioned for him to come nearer, and he approached the bedside, and looked with yearning love upon the young fading face. He took the boy’s thin white hand in his big brown palm, looked at it sorrowfully, and shook his head.

“He is better to-day, father,” said Lucy, cheerfully. “He has had a nice long sleep.” And she patted the lad’s head as though he had been a child.

Claude roused himself, and twined his long fragile fingers lovingly round the strong man's hand, looked up in his face, and said in the old boyish way,—

"Dear old dad, do not look so grave, or I shall think you are going to scold me for all the trouble I am giving you. It will be all right presently. Lift me on the couch."

In a moment the old man's sinewy arms were round him, lifting him up as though he had been a feather's weight, and laying him tenderly upon the couch by the fireside. He laid his hand lovingly upon the boy's head, and said in a voice rendered husky and half choking with strong emotion,

"I ain't good at talking, my own lad ; but I'd lay my old bones upon the rack to save you a moment's pain."

He turned from the couch and left him. Claude's eyes filled with tears as they followed him from the room ; and then returned to Lucy's face, as she sat with his hand in hers.

"I want to talk. I have so much to say, and so little time to waste," he murmured.

"What is it you mean, dear?" said Lucy, bending over him.

"Mean!" he repeated—"you *know* what I mean. I often see you cry—you can't always hide your tears. And I see the dear old father's face, and hear him at his prayers ; and I know you all feel the end is coming. Do not be silly, dear, do not cry. I should like to say many things—to leave as much of my soul with you as I can. But if you grieve so piteously, I must be still."

"I'll—I'll try not," said Lucy, trying to steady her voice, "but we must not despair, my darling brother ! The doctor says you are better." An expression of contempt crossed the boy's face as he answered, with a spice of his old impulsive way,—

"I hate to see that idiot coming in with his creaking footstep, soft smile, and silvery voice, 'How are we to-day?'—ah! well, we shall be better to-morrow,' when he knows there cannot be many more morrows for me ! I wish dear old Wynter was here—he would tell the truth—I should like to see him once more."

Lucy said she would send for him.

"Soon—let it be soon," he rejoined, "You know—and

"I know that I am dying! Confess the truth?" he turned her face towards him as he spoke.

"I—I fear it, brother," she said, as she sobbed outright, and she flung herself on her knees with her arms round him. "But I cannot bear it!—I cannot bear it!—it will break my heart."

Her tears *would* fall now, it seemed as though all the loving fears and dreads of the last few weary weeks, which she had hidden, and tried to cover with smiles, had burst forth, and could be still no longer.

"Hush! dear, hush! if you excite me it makes me cough—if you are not brave and strong—I cannot speak at all." She tried to command her voice, stifle her sobs, and look him calmly in the face. "I—I do not much mind it," he added, after a brief pause. She knew what he meant, for his lip quivered as though the brave spirit could not quite triumph over the weak flesh. "We must all go some day; I am going a little earlier—that is all."

He lay back musing for a while, and there was a sparkle of the old fun-loving spirit in his eyes, as he added—

"I have been thinking, and I give the odds in favour of my dying early. I should not care to live to grow grey, and die by inches, as old people do. To see youth and health and strength wither away, the hot blood to grow cold, the very power to love, to hope, to build castles, and dream bright dreams, to grow feeble and weak, and old familiar faces, lives that have flowed on side by side with our own, to drop away till we are left quite alone in the world, waiting to be snuffed out. And, ah! there are so many other things that make and mar so many lives. No—I am not sorry to die young."

His eyes wandered away to the low-lying purple hills in the distance, and his thoughts followed them. Though his body was lying there, the better part of him, his spirit, was away among the hills, and roaming through the wild woods, haunting the old nooks and corners, where his boyish feet had scrambled, which his living eyes would see no more.

The next morning the first words he spoke he inquired what day it was?

"Wednesday, the 24th of November," Lucy answered.

"The council meet to-day," he murmured, "to decide the prizes.

She knew well enough what he meant. Day after day, hour after hour, he had waited with feverish anxiety for that day to come. He was quite still for a few moments, and then added, "It ought to be mine—I worked so hard, and she looked so beautiful! I want to know how it is decided, Lucy, dear—I must know."

"Do not excite yourself about such things," she answered soothingly, "wait patiently, darling, you will know in time."

"Couldn't you telegraph to London," he urged, looking wistfully in her face. "They are a kindly set of men. Tell them I am dying—and—and I want to know—I can't die till I know."

The tears blinded her eyes as she said,—

"I will go myself." She rose up, but he drew her back.

"No, I can't spare you. Send Tom on the old brown mare. She used to fly when I was on her back."

Lucy wrote off a telegram to the Secretary of the Council, explaining, as well as she could in so brief a dispatch, the state of the case, beseeching for an immediate reply. This she sent off by the trusty messenger on the old mare, and returned to her brother's side.

"I have so many things to say, and so little time—so little breath—" His voice sank so low as to be almost inaudible to the quick ears of the loving girl who was bending over him. His words and his looks were so pitiful, that she could hardly keep back her sobs. "Don't fret much, dear, and do comfort the poor dad." A dreamy retrospective smile came into his eyes as he continued, "My old chums will miss me on their merry nights. I used to be the merriest among them. Well—they'll soon forget me—but the old father!—the dear old dad!"

He remembered that poor father's great love; how he had worked and toiled, garnered up his wealth, and walked through thorny paths, that his son might tread on roses. He had built up all his hopes, all his pride, his very life from year to year, on that frail genius that was even now being snuffed out. The boy was still thinking of the fond affection that had followed him all his days, and feeling sorry for his own shortcomings. All the small sins and follies he had

ever committed flashed upon him in an instant. His heart beat remorsefully as he remembered—what no one but himself knew—that in the midst of his gay artist friends, he had been ashamed of this good father, and lived in perpetual dread lest the grand old man, with his rough, honest ways, and labour-stained limbs, might appear among them. And that dread had been the spectre at poor foolish Claude's feast of life.

"Thank God!" he murmured, with a low sigh, "he never knew it, and I loved him all the same."

His step-mother, all through his tedious fading away, never neglected him; and would only have been too happy to have sat up with him and nursed him, and lectured him with uncontrolled freedom. But all her kind offices in that way were gratefully declined. Lucy never left him, nor allowed anyone to do anything for him except her father. Mrs. Nutford, however, paid him regular visits, and at every visit made inquiries as to the state of his mind, and renewed her offer to read to him. Once or twice, out of common, courteous gratitude, he listened to her; but as he got weaker he could not bear it.

"Keep her away," he would say to Lucy. "Her long prayers trouble and confuse me. She makes the way seem so grim and gloomy; but I look beyond, where it is all light."

His sweet human nature seemed to keep all its freshness, even when it was going down into the valley of the shadow of death. Pleasant thoughts seemed to brighten the darkest hour of his life, and send floating fancies through his brain, mingled with memories of old happy days, that were "by-gone for aye." Sometimes his words followed his thoughts, and he uttered them aloud.

"You remember when we were children," he said, looking fondly in his sister's eyes; "how we used to wonder about the stars, and the sun, and the moon? Doesn't it seem strange that *I*, who am here *now*, shall soon be there, above and among them all, and know so many, many things, that are puzzling the wisest of this wise world below? If I could only come back and tell you!—oh! if I only could! You used to be afraid of ghosts; have you outgrown that? Should you be afraid of mine, if I could come back and haunt you, dear?"

"Oh! Claude, dear brother," sobbed Lucy, "do not talk of these things now. You are not going among the stars! You are going back to God who made you."

"I know that," he answered, and a smile fluttered over his face. "I know I am going to God. Not to a God who is hard to the frail creatures he has made, but to the great glorious God, the Creator of all worlds—to the merciful God, Our Father who is in heaven."

He folded his hands meekly, and for a time was still—so still he hardly seemed to breathe. Suddenly he opened his eyes.

"Has Tom come back?"

"No, not yet."

"You told him to hurry?"

"Oh! yes, dear, yes; he will not be long."

Presently his lips moved again, and Lucy bent over him to catch his words. His white face flushed, as though the last red tide of life rose higher with the thought that stirred within him, as his pale lips murmured—

"Perhaps *she* will come and look at me when I am dead and stoop down and let her golden hair sweep over me, and kiss my cold forehead with her soft sweet lips! It never could have been so living, but it is worth dying for! It will be a consecration as holy as the priest's prayer; and, though I am dead, I shall feel it with my soul, and carry it up!"

He pointed upwards, and fell back too exhausted to say more. Lucy bathed his face, and sat patiently listening to the ticking of the old clock, and watching him with an aching heart, but tearless eyes. It grieved him so to see her grieve, that she tried to hide all signs from him. More than once he murmured, "Has it come?" Her heart sickened as she shook her head—"Not yet." He could not rest, but kept straining his eyes and his ears towards the door. Presently there was the sound of a horse galloping over the stony road in the distance. He seemed gifted with some sudden strength. He half sprang up on his couch.

"Hark! that is the clatter of the old mare's hoofs! Go, Lucy—meet him at the gate—bring it to me quick!"

He was right; it was the clatter of the old mare's hoofs, and they came nearer and nearer, and stopped at the garden gate. With out-stretched hands, Claude fixed

his eyes upon the door; there was a low murmuring of voices, and in another moment his old friend Paul Wynter held him in his arms and pressed him to his heart, which was too full for him to speak.

"Dear old friend!" said Claude, his face radiating with joyful surprise.

Paul laid him tenderly down, saying,—

"Hush! don't speak; it is here—I have got it. The Council met yesterday, and the prize is yours, dear boy. There was no hesitation—not one dissentient voice. I told them all; and they had pity on you, and sent this notification that the prize is yours. Then the great art critics—and the most celebrated artists of the day, said such warm things, such honest praises of you, their unknown brother Claude."

Paul unfolded the paper, and spread it before the boy's eyes, and read aloud all that was written there. Claude's whole face radiated with one wonderful smile, as he said,—

"*She* will live and look down in her sweet beauty, and win the wonder of all the world long after we are all gone—all dead! No one will believe that she was *real*, and that I, the painter, looked in her face, and painted her!"

The old man came into the room, and stood in silent, speechless grief beside his darling dying boy. Claude knew he was there, even before he looked upon him.

"Father," he whispered, "stoop down and kiss me once more."

The gaunt grey head bent low, and a bitter tear, wrung out from the very anguish of his heart, fell upon the young fading face. Presently the boy looked up at Paul Wynter, with that earnest wistfulness which, once seen in a dying face, can never be forgotten. His lips moved and he clutched Paul's hand with an unconscious convulsive clasp, as he whispered, in a voice so low that his friend bent his ear down to catch the words,—

"My Una! Mar—ga—ret!" The light flickered up, and then faded out of the wistful eyes. The sweet warm name froze upon the pale lips, and was printed there upon the cold clay, and stamped with the seal of death. It was all over at last—the light heart was still, and the joyous spirit hushed for ever. Lucy bent over him, and said, in a terrified whisper,—

"Claude, don't stare so! you frighten me."

Paul Wynter knew what had happened, but the others were love-blinded. He laid his hand reverently over the wide-open eyes, and motioned for the old man to leave the room. And he did so in a weak, helpless sort of way, saying to Paul, as he wrung his hand in passing,—

"Maybe you can do something for him, Sir—try. Keep him here a little longer. God help me! I'd like to have gone first."

Lucy had rushed for water. She thought he had only fainted. She could not believe that it was death, till Paul said solemnly,—

"It is all over now, my poor girl. You have no longer a brother."

"Yes, yes, I have!" sobbed Lucy, throwing her arms round that which had so lately been the living, breathing Claude. "While he is above ground, he is my brother still—I have not lost him."

"Hush, child—hush!" exclaimed Paul's soft voice soothingly. "Control yourself, for your poor father's sake. We must now think of the living—we can do no more good for him who has gone."

Reverently and tenderly, with his own hands, he arranged the dead, who had been dear as a young brother to him; and then strove to comfort, with such poor comfort as man can give, the bereaved father.

It was a long time before the old man could realise the fact that he had no son. When he was compelled to comprehend the truth, there was no violent outbreak of grief. He sat with his hand upon his knees, staring with tearless glassy eyes into the kitchen fire. Tears, that come so readily to relieve the warm, impulsive young, rise slowly to the eyes of the aged; and the old farmer shed not a single tear. When Paul tried to console him, and spoke in loving praise of the dead boy, of his brief, bright, unclouded life, of his dying while the richest bloom was on it, of his tasting nothing but the sweetness, knowing nothing of the bitterness that poisoned so many lives, the old man shook his head.

"Thank ye, Sir—thank ye kindly. You mean well—but my boy's dead! and my heart's broke."

Paul saw that it was better to leave him to himself and to time—that consoler of all griefs, the assuager of all tears.

The old man seemed so absorbed with his own speechless grief, he took no notice of any one—of who came, or who went. If he was asked any question respecting the funeral arrangements, he would look up wearily. “He didn’t mind—anything they liked—it didn’t matter—nothing mattered now—his boy was dead.” He went about his business in a grim, stern way. His friends and neighbours saw that their visits, and the consolatory phrases which are uttered over the afflictions of all men, were not appreciated—were, indeed, unheeded by him. They dropped away, and let him go on his silent way unnoticed and alone. He rarely spoke, except when spoken to; and when the day was done, and the evening closed in, he would sit down among the hushed household, and look absently at the black signs of mourning round him, as the busy fingers flew, but he made no remark. Once, when the coffin was brought in, he looked up, shivered, and crouched closer over the fire. He knew that that “something,” which had been his bright boy Claude, was to be inclosed there, and hidden away in a grave somewhere under the ground—a thing of corruption, that he might never, never look upon again. That night, as he sat watching the firelight fade, he moaned aloud,—

“It is very hard—I am an old man, and God might have had mercy on me!”

His wife looked up from the opposite side of the hearth, saying,—

“Well, if I was you, I wouldn’t fly in the face of Providence! You ought to set a Christian example of fortitude. Moaning and groaning ain’t the right way to bear sorrows.”

“If he had only taken me instead!” added the old man, muttering his thoughts aloud; for though he heard his wife’s words, their meaning did not reach his sense; but she thought she was doing her duty and edifying him.

“God knows his own business best, and it ain’t for worms like us to say who’s to go, or who’s to stay. Them things are settled above.”

He caught the last words in their full meaning, and echoed them,—

“Settled above, wife!—yes. I wonder if my prayers ever

reached there above? I prayed so heartily that God would hear me!"

"The arrogantest thing a man can do, sending a message to heaven, and expecting an answer back! It's taking liberties with your Maker. It's ridikerlous to think he'd change his will at the prayers of a potter's clay; and, indeed, if he listened to all the prayers poor, miserable, rebellious worms send up, he'd have enough to do, especially as he's got millions of other worlds to look after as well as this celestial globe. If you would only leave off moaning, which is rank, wicked rebellion against God's will, we might be thinking of something comforting to be put upon the poor boy's tombstone. I'm sure I loved him as though he'd been my own, but I don't fly in the face of Providence. I have read the Scriptures. 'The Lord gave—the Lord hath taken away,' and I say Amen!"

All her scolding and upbraiding failed to rouse her husband, or change the current of his grief. Paul Wynter stayed till the funeral was over, did all he could for the family, and was most helpful in their time of trouble. He gave Lucy the best advice for her father's benefit, and then returned to London, where his presence, in many ways, was necessary. In the course of a week or so, he promised to come down again.

Meanwhile, Lucy devoted herself with unremitting affection to her father, trying by every means in her power to rouse and amuse him. But her efforts were unavailing; the best part of his life seemed to be buried in his boy's grave. The blow had fallen so heavily upon him, that all his energies were prostrated beneath it; he had no power to rise up—no strength for reaction. Some strong mental chord seemed to have given way, and weakened all the rest. His mind had lost its balance—its vigour was all gone; he seemed to know that, for he clung to Lucy, and looked to her, and relied on her for everything. He shrank away from his stern, strong-minded wife, who constantly upbraided him for giving way, and boasted that she would never let affliction run her down. She who should have been his chief comforter, so frightened and worried him, first about this world, then about the next, that he got dazed and bewildered. It was no wonder he clung to his loving,

tender daughter, who would have given half her young life to have rendered his whole and sound again.

One morning, as he sat down, exhausted by a very slight exertion, he said, with a vague, uncertain look,—

"I don't know how it is, but I don't feel quite myself, Lucy. My head's bad, and I forget things. If—if anything should ever go wrong with me, you'll never leave me, dear." And he peered anxiously into her face, as though he was afraid of something, but did not like to say what.

"Never, father!" she answered, giving him an assuring hug. "Never!—you may be sure of that."

And he added sorrowfully—

"The wife says I'm getting old and foolish."

"She had better look after her own follies!" exclaimed Lucy, angrily. "She talks like——"

"Hush! my dear, hush! She's been a good wife—a very good wife. A little too hard sometimes. But then, you know, she is a strictly religious woman, and she does not think we are quite godly enough; and I daresay she's right—I daresay she's right."

The old man sighed and folded his hands humbly, in a self-upbraiding spirit, that cut Lucy to the heart.

"Don't talk like that, father dear," she said. "I cannot bear you to speak and to look so. One grain of your pure, true-hearted faith, is worth a bushel of cant phrases, that often hide a world of uncharitableness."

"Ay! ay! but I know I've not been so good a man as I ought——"

"You have been the best and dearest father in the world."

"I've worked hard, very hard, early and late, and I've been proud of my strength, proud of my labour, and of my land; proud of my honourable forefathers, and—and I was proud of my boy. Wife says I made an idol of clay, and that's why God took him from me."

"God took him because it was time for him to go," said Lucy, softly.

The old man shook his head sorrowfully, and rubbed his hands nervously together as he said in a broken voice,—

"I was too proud on him. I wanted him to be better

nor his fathers. He had such grand, proud ways, and I was choked up wi' vanity and pride in him. I'd ha' lived half-starved, or have died on a dunghill, if I could ha' seen him lord o' the land. I know it was all vanity now. What do the prayers say, dear?—"That we should do our duty in that station o' life in which it pleases God to call us." Well, I wasn't satisfied wi' that, and—and what the wife says is true, Lucy—I was too proud o' my boy, and the Lord took him from me. I—I can't say 'Thy will be done.' I want him to take me too."

He never rallied from his depressed, desponding state, even for an hour. He took no interest in anything, and at last even his wife saw there was something wrong with the old man. She forgot her cut-and-dried scriptural phrases, and the rebellious wickedness of the world, and began to care for him in the right womanly way. She gave him the cosiest nook in the chimney corner, brought him bits of news from the world without, and, if anything was awry, put it right with a cheering word. He felt there was something different in her ways. Once he put his hand on her, and said with a vague smile,—

"You've been a good wife, Bessy, and we've trudged on through thick and thin together for a good many years."

"As for that," she answered, with more feeling than she was used to show, "I daresay I've been shorter nor I ought, times and often; but it's aggravatin' to see a man let himself die without an effort to the contrary; and though your ways ain't always been my ways, I shall be but a poor lone woman without you; though I hope I shall submit without rebellion to God's will."

"Ay, ay, you're a better Christian than I am," sighed the old man, as her bony hand pressed his with the nearest approach to affection she had ever thought it discreet to bestow upon him. So long as he had strength to move he sat in the chimney-corner; but one day his place was empty. He was lying in the chamber above, passing away. There was a crack in his heart somewhere, through which his life was leaking out. There was no pain, only intense lassitude. He was tired with the long walk through life, and lay down to rest. Sleep, a sleep eternal came to the

dim eyes, rest to the aching limbs—the burden of life slipped so gently away, they hardly knew when it had fallen from him. At last the old grey head lay peacefully on its pillow. There was no moan from his lips now ; he was past all grief and sorrow ; quit of the world and the world's business for evermore !





CHAPTER XXXVII.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN.

“If there be a human tear
From passion’s dross refined and clear,
’Tis that which pious fathers shed
Upon a duteous daughter’s head.”

AS soon as Mr. Brookland was sufficiently recovered, he was anxious to get home. However, he had not been able to transact one half the business he intended. The meeting of the directors of the new company was postponed, the offices not being in a fit state to receive them; but Mr. Craig brought him all the intelligence about the progress of affairs, and gave him minute details of all the transactions. Matters seemed to be in the most perfectly satisfactory state, and he was contented. Besides, whenever he pleased, or whenever his presence was necessary, he could run up to London for a few days. If Margaret had consulted her own inclinations, she would have remained in town a few weeks longer. Somehow she began to dread the long autumn, or rather wintry days at Brooklands; for November is sometimes more dark and dreary than the actual winter months, when clear cold frost is in the air, and snow is on the ground. It is true all the autumn days of her life had been passed there, and she had never felt it lonely before. She had plenty of visiting when she chose to do it; plenty of

friends, at least acquaintances, if she pleased to cultivate them, and the constant companionship of Mrs. Creamly.

But for the last few months Mrs. Creamly had been losing ground in Margaret's estimation ; indeed her presence had lately acted as an irritant on her nerves, or a wet blanket on her spirits.

There was also in Margaret's heart a rankling sense of injury and wrong against Paul Wynter. She felt he had not treated her with the courteous consideration she had a right to expect from him. He had certainly attended her father with untiring devotion during his illness ; but then he took the very earliest opportunity of leaving him, and even then had said no word of leave-taking to her. She felt that he had purposely avoided her ; and she asked herself the reason why, but could find no satisfactory answer. Every day she fancied he would come to make inquiries, and at least show some interest in his patient, some courtesy to her ; but day after day passed and he never came. She had fancied that her father's illness would make all matters right again, and that the old familiar intercourse would be resumed ; but that was not to be, her experience showed her she was wrong. Then she fancied he was cold and unforgiving ; or, "perhaps," she thought, and the blood of all the Brooklands seemed to rush into her cheeks, "I have been too kind, have shown too much sympathy, and let him see how highly I valued his friendship, and he wished to show me how little he cares for mine."

She was angry and hurt at his studiously avoiding the house, and longed with all her heart for the old happy days to come back again. Although she was weary of waiting, tired of the ever recurring disappointment, yet she would gladly have waited, with a vague idea that they might meet somewhere ; but when her father proposed to return to Brooklands, she made no demur, but arranged matters so that they might go the very next morning ; which they did.

Once more at Brooklands, they soon resumed their old habits. Father and daughter spent much more time together than they had done for the last few months. He would invite her into his study to read to him ; and then they walked and talked together, and took a long drive

every day, which they had not done for some weeks past. His time had been so much taken up with business ; and Joel Craig always found so much occupation for him, that he never seemed to have an hour to himself.

At times Margaret fancied she saw a great change in him ; though he was apparently in perfectly good health, yet his illness seemed to have aged him very much. She noticed this especially one evening as he lay on the sofa, and she was playing him to sleep. There was a worn, weary look on his face, as he lay there with his eyes closed, and the muscles of his face relaxed, that, even as she looked at him, the tears slowly welled into her eyes. She wondered if he was ill, or if it was only the lines of advancing age she saw ? Alas ! it is almost as sad to watch the hand of time stealing strength from the limbs, vigour from the soul, and even memory from the brain, as to see death stealing away life itself ! Her solemn thought seemed to creep to the very ends of her fingers, and give a weird, dirge-like wail to the sounds she was creating. When Mr. Brookland opened his eyes, he said,—

“Why, Margaret, love, what is that funereal fugue you have been playing ? It has haunted me, and been a sort of accompaniment to my drowsy dream.”

“I hardly know, papa,” she answered, rising from the piano ; “I fancy I have been extemporising, and I hoped you had been asleep.”

“Not exactly,” he answered ; “I have been in a delightful half-dreamy, half-conscious state, that is far pleasanter than sleep itself. I do not know how it is, but I have slept very little lately.”

“Are you sure you are quite well, papa ?” she asked, as she nestled down by his side, and passed her arms with a soft caressing motion round his neck, and looked with an anxious loving look into his face.

“Well !” he repeated quickly. “Yes, certainly, quite well—never was better—do I look ill ?” he added in some alarm ; for, like most nervous people, if his thoughts were once directed to an imaginary ailment, he never rested till he fancied he had got it. He would feel his own pulse fifty times a day ; read up, and literally hunt down the different symptoms, till he fancied he had got them everyone

imprisoned in his own breast or bones, or nerves, as the case might be.

Margaret knew this well enough, and hastened to reply,—

“Oh! no, papa, dear, you do not look ill at all ——”

“Then why do you ask?”

“Well, I fancied you had not been quite in your usual spirits lately,” she said.

“Very likely not,” he answered; “I have a great many things to think of—matters, my dear child, that you could not enter into, nor understand—that require a man’s brain to comprehend, a man’s intellect to give advice upon. That is where I miss Mr. Craig so much.”

“He has not been down to Brooklands since our return, papa.”

“No.”

“Then why do you not ask him?”

“Because I do not think he would come.”

“Not come, papa? Why?”

“It is quite as well you should know the reason why, my child,” answered Mr. Brookland. “You remember he and I had a long talk together, the day before we left London.”

“Yes, I remember it quite well.”

“And I daresay you wondered what we were talking about,” he rejoined.

“No, I cannot say I did,” answered Margaret. “I have got so used to these tiresome business interviews, papa, that I never wondered at all. I did not suppose it was about anything that would interest me.”

“And yet our conversation concerned you entirely, Margaret,” he answered.

“What could he have to say about me?” exclaimed Margaret, in unfeigned surprise.

“The old—old story, Margaret,” replied her father. “It is very hard that young people cannot be brought together, but, like the action between flint and steel, the spark is struck and one takes fire; and it is very hard on me,” he added, patting her golden head fondly, “that I cannot have a friend without his falling in love with my daughter.”

“Dear papa,” said Margaret, blushing and laughing at the same time. “You do not mean to say that Mr. Craig has done—has presumed to do anything so foolish?”

"I do not know about its being so very foolish," he answered; "I think even a wise man might be forgiven for such a folly. I know you do not care for him, darling, and I told him so. I was very sorry for him. He seemed sadly cut up. He is a good fellow, Margaret, and has been an invaluable friend to me, and during my illness he was most kind and thoughtful in all he did for you. We shall both miss him; but I suppose it cannot be helped."

"No papa," replied Margaret in a grave, decided voice, "it cannot be helped. I am very sorry, and I must say I think he was very foolish to think of me in that sort of way; he ought to have known it would be no use—I always thought he was very presuming."

"I do not see any presumption at all in a fine handsome, dashing fellow, and a gentleman—as Mr. Craig undoubtedly is—proposing for any girl under the sun. I have a higher opinion, a much higher opinion of him, now, than ever I had. He has behaved in a most honourable, straightforward manner, Margaret, and explained his circumstances so freely. He acknowledges he is a poor man, and boasts of no expectations. He knows that poverty would weigh nothing in my opinion, when balanced against a good old family name and an honourable character. He put his case entirely in my hands; whereas many a man, with his opportunities, would have ingratiated himself first into your good graces, and have consulted me only when my interference would have been too late. I am afraid you have been in some way prejudiced against him."

He looked at her with an expression of sharp enquiry as he spoke.

"No, indeed, papa," she answered frankly, "he is exactly one of those men whom everybody likes, and everybody speaks of with a note of admiration! I am heartily tired of hearing his praises—everybody else seems to care so much about him. Perhaps that is the very reason why I care so little."

Mr. Brookland sat thoughtful for a moment, then added,—

"Do you think you could ever be brought to care a little for him, darling?"

"Never, papa, never!" she answered quickly; "please

do not think it possible—I hope he will keep away. If he were to come here now, and try to make himself agreeable, I think I should hate him outright.”

“Well, I do not understand it,” said her father. “I frankly own I wish it had been otherwise. I should have thought he was just the sort of man that any woman would have been proud to accept—a fine, strong, manly fellow! Just the friend and protector a woman needs.”

“But the days have gone by when a woman needed a man’s strong arm to defend her, papa. I care as little for a strong-limbed man as a strong minded woman,” said Margaret, with a slight accent of contempt. “One never thinks of the length or strength of a man’s limbs in these days. A woman only wants a brave, true, loving heart to rest on, and that comprises all the other things that make happiness of life the sunshine of home.”

“Well, my dear child, things must take their course. It is all very well,” he added, drawing her fondly to him, and caressing her golden head, “so long as I am spared to you, darling. But I thought a great deal of you while I was ill, and the worst pain, the worst agony I endured, arose from the thought of leaving my child alone in the world.”

From the earnest, tremulous tone of his voice, it was evident that that thought had lain heavy and strong at his heart.

“It is an awful thing, Margaret, for a dying man to feel that he is leaving a young thing like you to buffet with the world, and bear alone the responsibility of an untried, inexperienced life. I must own that I should like to commit my darling to some kind, loving hands, before I close my eyes for ever.”

She closed his lips with a kiss.

“I hope it will be many, many years before you close your eyes in that way, papa, dear; and while you are here I want no one else to care for me, and when you go you will leave me in His hands without whose will not even a sparrow falls. When I have no longer a father on earth, dear, I shall have two in heaven—you, and that other who is the universal Father of us all.”

The subject soon dropped between them, but it still lay near to Mr. Brookland’s heart. The ascendancy Mr. Craig

had gained over him was extraordinary. He was literally fascinated by his brilliant qualities, and taken by storm. He believed in him so utterly, that he could not be led to question anything concerning him. For a question would have seemed to imply a doubt, and he doubted nothing. He had spoken to Margaret, and directed her thoughts to Mr. Craig in quite a new light. He had sown the seed, and was content to bide his time, and not act as little children do, dig up the seeds from day to day, to see if they are growing. He never mentioned Mr. Craig's name to Margaret, though she knew that letters were constantly passing between them.

One morning Margaret was startled by her father saying suddenly,—

“By-the-by, I think we shall have a visitor to dine with us to-day, Margaret ——”

The colour flew to her face.

“Was he coming to Brooklands to persecute her with his odious attentions?”

Her father evidently read her look, and understood it as well as spoken words.

“I should not ask any one here,” he added, “whose coming I thought would be disagreeable to you, my child. The visitor I mean is Dr. Reeves. He went up to town yesterday, and I asked him to get me a cheque cashed at my banker's. He was to return this morning, and I asked him to dine with us this evening.”

“I shall be delighted to see him,” she answered—“I am very fond of the dear old rector. If he would only shorten his sermons, and eschew politics, he would be perfection.”

“And, Margaret, dear, I think you may as well drive over to the Creamlys, and ask them to join us. You may, perhaps, contrive to bring Mrs. Creamly back with you in the carriage, and I will send the dog-cart over to meet Mr. Creamly as he leaves his office. We shall be able to get up a rubber to-night.”

Margaret did as he requested. She was fortunate enough to find Mrs. Creamly at home, and that lady was immediately seized with a fit of apologies for being discovered dusting the knick-knackeries in her little drawing-room,

which was arranged with as much taste and elegance as could be desired. Its smallest trivialities bore evidence of the presiding genius of a refined and cultivated woman—and such, in truth, she was; and had she not marred her natural good nature by sundry small meannesses, arising from the constant habit of contrasting her comparative poverty and general condition with that of other people, she would have been an estimable and valued friend; but as the leopard cannot change its spots, neither could poor Mrs. Creamly change the one weak spot in her nature, which enfeebled the better part of it. She would insist upon apologising for the size of her house, the scantiness of her wardrobe, and because her gooseberry was not champagne, nor her maid-servant a boy in buttons—indeed, sometimes her friends expected she would apologise for being born at all.

“Things were so different in my poor dear papa’s, the General’s, time,” she used to say; and, indeed, if she lived to be a hundred years old, she would never let the deceased officer rest in peace, or his splendours be forgotten.

Margaret only smiled, and put in a few words now and then. She was so used to Mrs. Creamly’s ways, that she knew it would be as difficult to stop the flow of a mountain torrent as the expression of Mrs. Creamly’s ostentatious humility. She was afraid to look at or admire anything. If she examined the odds and ends of quaint old china, she was afraid of being inundated with the history of “dear papa’s” magnificent Dresden, and its cruel sacrifice at the hands of an unscrupulous auctioneer. If she remarked the engravings—and there were several very fine ones upon the walls—Mrs. Creamly immediately apologised for their not being oil-paintings, and launched out into a long explanation of the reasons why she could not indulge her inclination, and patronise high art. Margaret steered as clear as possible of all subjects likely to awaken Mrs. Creamly’s slumbering remembrance or regrets. She gave her father’s invitation and proposal, that, if possible, Mrs. Creamly should return with her to Brooklands. Mrs. Creamly was charmed to accept—“It was so very kind and thoughtful of Mr. Brookland to send the carriage, and the dog-cart is to fetch dear Augustus! Well, that will be

delightful! Though I have no petty feelings or small vanities, dear, I must say I shall be glad for those horrid banking people to see him whirled from the office door in your father's dog-cart."

So saying, she sailed up the stairs to make some little preparations before starting. Her arrangements were soon made. She reappeared in less than half-an-hour, all smiles and amiability. A small leather bag, full of mysterious pads, and ribbons, and laces, which were to complete and beautify her evening toilette, was given into the footman's charge, and she and Margaret were soon seated in the carriage, and rattling over the rough roads towards the High Street, there to indulge in the mild dissipation of an hour's shopping in the sleepy little town. Mrs. Creamly took advantage of the opportunity to transact a little business of her own, and they were so delayed by one little matter and another, that it was almost dusk when they reached Brooklands.

About half-an-hour before dinner was served, Dr. Reeves was announced. He and the ladies exchanged the usual compliments, and after greeting him with his usual heartiness, Mr. Brookland added,—

"And what news?—anything new stirring? You know, coming fresh from the City, you ought to be a day in advance of the *Times*."

"I wish the *Times* would go on a few years in advance of me," he answered, "instead of hurrying me along with the stream, turning my hair white, and the milestones I leave behind me into gravestones, so that when I look back I can scarce tell one from the other."

"Well, you certainly have no special reason to complain," exclaimed Mrs. Creamly. "Time gives no quarter, but treats us all alike."

"Pardon me," said the courtly old gentleman, with a polite bow, "but you are a living specimen to prove that Time itself may be won over to show favour to the ladies!"

"Oh! Dr. Reeves," she answered, patting him playfully with her fan, "how can you expect us to profit by your discourse on Sundays, when you yourself flatter our vanity during the week?"

Now, though Dr. Reeves would occasionally shoot a com-

pliment into a lady's ear, or sprinkle her vanity with little savoury speeches, yet he never gave a continuous shower, and was by no means disposed to be beguiled into a discussion with Mrs. Creamly. He merely smiled and answered that "truth should never come under the denomination of flattery." Then, turning to Mr. Brookland, he added,—

"But, talking of news, Brookland, did you see an advertisement in the *Times* the other day inquiring for a gentleman named Paul Treherne?"

Mr. Brookland acknowledged that he had observed the advertisement.

"Well, it is a most extraordinary story. Digby tells me that your old friend Wynter is the identical man. It is quite a romantic affair. I know that there is a great deal of good in the world, but I never came across so much self-sacrifice, heroism, and honourable endurance combined."

"I know the whole story," said Mr. Brookland. He did not want the whole story to be recapitulated to Mrs. Creamly's longing ears.

"You do?" exclaimed the surprised rector. "What! about Miss Eversleigh and the thirty thousand pounds?"

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Brookland, amazed in his turn. "I thought you alluded to his father's unfortunate story."

"You know that? Then here comes the sequel. Of course you remember that he gave up his entire fortune, and literally made a beggar of himself, in order to replace that which his father had appropriated? Well, the lady whose trust had been betrayed was young, beautiful, and desperately in love, I hear, with this gentleman, Mr. Wynter, or Treherne, whichever you like to call him, and she has died, and in her will has returned to him, unreservedly, his entire fortune! The text, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and it shall return to thee,' was never better exemplified than in this case."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Brookland, with unfeigned pleasure, "I am heartily rejoiced to hear of his good fortune. He is a capital fellow, and richly deserves it."

"A magnificent fellow, I call him!" replied the rector. "There are hundreds and thousands of men who, if an opportunity occurred, would do a grand heroic action; but the silent, solemn spirit of endurance, the utter self-abnega-

tion, and magnanimous conduct that has marked this gentleman's career, is heroism of a higher and nobler kind."

While Dr. Reeves was speaking Margaret sat with pale cheeks and lips apart, listening with her heart in her ears, her eyes glistening with tender rejoicing, as she drank in the praises of the absent Paul Wynter. She had always been fond of the rector, but she could have embraced him now. His just appreciation, his warm eulogistic praise of Paul Wynter became his lips so well, they seemed wiser than his sermons, and as pure even as his prayers. So he who, in her estimation, was the embodiment of all that was noble, tender, and true, was a hero in other eyes beside her own! But, even with this thought, a flush of pain and grief crimsoned her brow. She remembered that *he* had stood there, where Dr. Reeves was standing now, and told his lamentable story, and received but cold justice, and an ungenerous dismissal from Brooklands. She and her father seemed scrupulously to avoid looking in each other's face. Mr. Brookland felt an uncomfortable twitching in his conscience, as though he heard his own condemnation in the words of his old friend.

"For my part," the rector continued, after a momentary pause, "I think it is a great pity the young lady died—she ought to have lived and married him. A woman's hand is never so well employed as in soothing the hurt mind and rewarding a nature for the blows of an unkind fate, or at least helping it to bear them."

"Well," said Mrs. Creamly, "speaking from a masculine point of view, no doubt there is a good deal of truth in what you say. Of course I am delighted at Mr. Wynter's good fortune; but I would rather it had come to him in some other way; for, to my idea, there is a gross indelicacy in a young girl falling desperately in love with a man at all. But dying and leaving a fortune to him, with, I daresay, a great deal of sentimental twaddle attached to it, only makes matters worse, and leaves a kind of shadow on her grave. Poor Mr. Wynter, I respect him very much, but I certainly cannot understand any woman falling in love with—with a man of that description. But then, *I* have an artistic eye, and anything out of a natural graceful form and symmetry—in fact, anything inartistic, revolts my senses."

"God has made nothing inartistic, Mrs. Creamly," replied the rector; "and man in any shape is the noblest of them all. As for Mr. Wynter's slight deformity, as soon as he opens his mouth, you forget to look at it; before he has been in the room five minutes, you forget it is there. At least, it was so with me; but then I am a man," he added, pleasantly, "and not blest with an artistic eye. Nothing annoys me but a deformity of the spirit; and beneath all the graceful lines and curves of symmetrical humanity, I fancy I can generally detect that. But what does my fair friend Margaret say? She is young, and ought to be a better judge on this matter than we are."

"Well," replied Margaret, "I say that no woman need blush for loving such a man. So far from it casting a shadow on her grave, it sheds a glory on it; for *he* will remember when all the world has forgotten her."

"Yes; and speaking in a mercenary spirit, he has good cause to remember her, my dear. Any woman might buy the most affectionate remembrance at the price of thirty thousand pounds."

Mrs. Creamly saw that her opinions were in a minority. Even her husband was too much occupied with his eloquent thoughts to do more than endorse her opinions with an occasional grunt. Margaret made no answer, but relapsed into angry silence. Mr. Brookland entered into a discussion upon the legal bearing of the case, and the possibility of the will being propounded, etc. Mrs. Creamly hazarded a hundred guesses as to how he would dispose of the money, and expatiated upon the extraordinary good fortune that haunted some people to the end of their lives.

"Thirty thousand pounds! Margaret, dear, think of that! Why, the thirtieth part of that sum would buy my peace of mind for the next twelve months; and poor Augustus's too. For though he does not talk much, he feels his position acutely. But there, it is no use talking, some people are born under a lucky star, and some people wander away from it; and the longer they live, the more distant they get."

The conversation between the rector and Mr. Brookland had drifted to their own affairs.

"By-the-bye, how does your gas company progress?" the

rector asked. "I am afraid you find it rather a costly affair."

"Well," replied Mr. Brookland, "I never expected it to pay in the beginning ; but it will be a magnificent thing. Of course it is occasionally inconvenient, as it takes all my spare cash."

"So it seems," replied the rector, thoughtfully. "And I hope in the end you will not be disappointed in your expectations."

"There is no fear of that," said Mr. Brookland. "And talking of money matters, you did not forget to cash my cheque?"

"No," he answered. "Messrs. Stevenson and Salt cashed the cheque, but they begged me to remind you that your balance of five thousand pounds was drawn out ten days ago. At the same time, they will be happy to advance whatever you require."

"What !" exclaimed Mr. Brookland, "drawn out ten days ago ! Five thousand pounds gone !" He sank back in his chair, and stared with blank amazement in the rector's face.

"Good heavens ! Brookland, you knew it, surely?"

"No. It has not been drawn out by my order. I have signed no cheque. If it is really gone, it has been obtained by forgery !"





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRACKED.

"Think'st thou there are no serpents in this world
But those who slide along the grassy sod
And sting the luckless foot that presses them?
There are who in the path of social life
Do bask their spotted skins in fortune's sun,
And sting the soul."



HEY sat there a long time talking ever the matter of the newly-discovered forgery. Mr. Brookland resolved that he would go off to London the next morning, see his banker, and learn all particulars. It appeared to him that matters must have been conducted in the most unpardonably loose manner, for so large a sum as five thousand pounds to be drawn out and handed to a stranger without strict scrutiny and a most careful examination of the signature of the cheque.

Mrs. Creamly was in a state of irrepressible excitement. She buzzed from one to the other, asking a hundred questions, and hazarding expressions of wonder about the matter. She puzzled herself to discover who could be the forger. Of course it must be somebody who not only knew Mr. Brookland's banker, but his handwriting, and was clever enough to imitate it.

"Of course it need be nothing of the kind," said the rector. "Those who make it their business to live on the property of other people, discover all these things easily

enough. They can find out the domestic habits and personal peculiarities of their victim as easily as a cat does a mouse."

As Mr. Brookland and Margaret sat quietly discussing the affair after their visitors had departed, he said,—

"I'll start to-morrow morning, Margaret. I think I'll write a note to Mr. Craig; I should like to talk the affair over with him. He's a long-headed fellow—cleverer than half the lawyers, I think. If I knew where he lived, I'd call upon him."

"Don't you know where he lives, papa?—and you are writing to him every day?" said Margaret, surprised.

"No," replied Mr. Brookland, "he is always moving about from one place to another. The safest way to get at him is to address him at a bachelor's club to which he belongs. I have always done so, and my letters have never missed. I shall ask him to meet me at the station when I return, and bring him back to Brooklands with me. You don't object?"

"I! Oh! no, certainly not—why should I?" said Margaret, blushing slightly as she spoke.

Mr. Brookland carried out his intention of writing to Mr. Craig, but instead of sending the letter by post as he intended, he called himself, and left it at the club—not one of the fashionable mansions at the West-end, but an unpretending house in a quarter of the town a little north of Oxford Street. Upon inquiry, he ascertained that Mr. Craig had not been there for some days past, but was hourly expected. He next directed his steps to the bankers, and was immediately shown into the private room of the senior partner, Mr. Stevenson. After the briefest salutation possible, Mr. Brookland proceeded to business, expressing his surprise at having heard that his balance had been drawn out, and he requested to see the draft on which the money had been paid.

It was immediately shown to him. He examined it carefully.

"It is a clever imitation," he said, "I must admit. I could almost have sworn to it myself! Wonderfully like, that B is, and then the the flourish is perfect! I do not wonder that your cashier was deceived."

"I can hardly understand it," replied Mr. Stevenson. "I know that there was even more precaution than usual exercised in cashing it. I must own that to me it did seem strange that, after having had dealings with the firm for so many years, you should suddenly draw out your entire balance. I'll tell you exactly how it occurred. When the cheque was presented, the cashier brought it in to me, not liking to pay out so large an amount on his own responsibility. I inquired who presented it? A stranger, he said. I got up, went to the glass door, and looked over the counter. I immediately recognised a gentleman who had once accompanied you in a visit here some three months ago. I remembered him well; he was a tall, handsome, and remarkably fine man, and you were talking about some company you were getting up. I, of course, unhesitatingly ordered the money to be paid, feeling sure it was all correct."

"I remember coming here about three months ago, accompanied by a very confidential friend of mine," replied Mr. Brookland; "and, as you say, he is a remarkably fine fellow, but I have no doubt you have been misled by some accidental likeness."

"I think not," said the banker, smiling.

"At any rate," rejoined Mr. Brookland, "I will endeavour to see my friend at once, and bring him here with me. I am convinced you will see at once that you have deceived yourself, and mistaken some other person for him."

"I think we shall have no difficulty in discovering the truth," replied Mr. Stevenson; "for not knowing why I was so easily satisfied, my cashier ordered him to be followed, and our porter watched him to this address"—he took down a ledger, and read aloud, "No. 33 Harley Street; so, you see, there will be no difficulty whatever in tracing the gentleman. Perhaps you can tell at once whether or not this is your friend's address?"

"I really do not know his private residence," replied Mr. Brookland, slightly taken aback, "though I always know where to find him—which I will do at once."

"You need not take the slightest trouble in the matter," said the banker. "You know the loss is ours. You may

be quite content to let the matter rest entirely in our hands."

"Very well ; but you will communicate to me any success you may have. I shall be most anxious to know ; for, at any rate, I should not permit the entire loss to fall upon you."

When Mr. Brookland left the bank, he was more than ever anxious to see Joel Craig. He called a Hansom, and ordered the man to drive him to 310 Victoria Street, Westminster. He was anxious to see the offices of the gas company, and thought it probable he might find Mr. Craig there, or at least obtain his address. They drove up one side of the street and down the other—there was no such number to be found. He always carried one of the prospectuses in his pocket-book ; he took it out now to see if he had mistaken the number, though he hardly thought that possible. No, he had made no mistake ; there was the number printed as plainly as possible—310, Victoria Street, Westminster ! He glanced down upon the names of those gentlemen who formed the committee, and who were all men of acknowledged station and repute. Pooh ! there must be a mistake somewhere. If he had been taken in, so had they, and that was not likely—for though an accomplished rogue might successfully swindle one man, it was not likely he would attempt to play the same game with a dozen, especially when, as in this case, they were all embarked, or supposed to be embarked, in the same concern. Surely some one among them would have made personal enquiries as to the existence and well-being of the gas company ?

So ran the current of Mr. Brookland's thoughts. A doubt, that did not quite rise to a suspicion, disturbed his mind. He was half angry with himself for distrusting this man, whom he had so heartily esteemed ; and yet—and yet—well, he would not argue even in his own mind upon probabilities or possibilities—he could easily ascertain the truth. After a little consideration, he resolved to call upon one of his fellow-directors, and learn the true state of affairs respecting the gas company.

He accordingly glanced down the paper upon the different names, and chose from among them a gentleman who

occupied a responsible position in Somerset House, whither he desired to be driven direct. On arriving there, he found no difficulty in obtaining the desired interview. He apologised for his intrusion, and showing the prospectus, said he wished to have a little conversation upon the prospects of the company of which he believed they were fellow-directors.

At first it was evident the gentleman fancied he had come on some polite begging expedition, not exactly understanding the drift of his words, and was freezingly polite. But Mr. Brookland entered on a fuller explanation, and pointed to his name and address, which were printed on the paper. He read it to the end, and then handed it back.

"I know nothing whatever of this concern," he said, "and, of course, I could have given no authority for my name to be printed here. In my belief the affair is a wholesale swindle."

"I am sorry for having troubled you," began Mr. Brookland.

"Not at all. I wish I could have given you a more satisfactory answer. But I should advise you to put the affair at once into the hands of your solicitor."

Mr. Brookland's faith in Mr. Craig had received its death-blow, though it did not immediately die out. He made further inquiries, and all the information he gained from every source only proved more conclusively how utterly he had been duped! The whole prospectus, with its proposals, and its spurious names of imaginary directors, was a well-organised lie! And there was, there could be, no doubt now that Mr. Joel Craig was the sole organiser and inventor of the whole plot. Mr. Brookland was agitated, hurt, and angry, as this conviction forced itself upon his mind. He had, at different times, placed large sums of money at Mr. Craig's disposal. Of course it was all gone; and instead of calculating on profitable returns, he must consider it a dead loss. Still it was not that which grieved him, but the loss of his friend, or rather the discovery that the name of "friend" had been desecrated. The false friend had been the true impostor. Since his old college days, when he was young, and he had revelled in the

delights of "chumdom," he had never cared so much for any man as for Joel Craig—indeed he was the only man he had ever seen whom he would have been glad to welcome as a son. How he shuddered at the idea of that, now that he knew the man as he was, not as he seemed to be. Heart-sick and utterly cast down, he returned to Brooklands, meditating on the changed aspect of affairs by the way. It gave him some pain and sorrow to think that he and his cheery companion could never meet again; at least never in the old pleasant way, and regret mingled strongly with his anger. However great the sin and false the sinner we have loved and trusted, we cannot cut him out of our life, out of our heart, and cast him from us without a pang, even while we are smarting under the sting of his ingratitude. Mr. Brookland's complicated feelings boiled and bubbled in his breast, struggling one with another, until indignation overpowered all the rest. One thing, however, he determined on—he would take no steps to punish this false friend, but leave him to the fate that would surely one day overtake him, for the the path of evil must lead to destruction.

When he reached home, he found Margaret all anxiety to hear about the doings of the day.

"Well, papa dear," she said, embracing him, "how tired and worried you look! I shall not ask you any questions just yet, though I am dying to know how you have got on, and if you have discovered anything."

"I will tell you at once, my child," he answered, "I have discovered three things: that I have been duped and swindled by the man I trusted—that there is no gas company—no directors—and that Joel Craig is an impostor and a villain!"

Margaret looked at him in silent amazement. He folded her in his arms, adding, in an agitated voice,—

"Oh, Margaret!—Margaret! God only knows how I have wished, almost prayed that you could have loved this man! If it had been so, if things had fallen out as I most earnestly desired, I should have died with grief and shame!"

Margaret was deeply distressed by her father's agitation. A confused idea that some heavy affliction, connected with

crime, disgrace, and ruin, had fallen upon them, took possession of her mind.

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed with clasped hands, looking eagerly in his face, "is it anything very terrible! Tell me all the truth at once. Has he done us much harm?"

"Harm! my child," he answered, "yes, he has done me an irreparable wrong. He has destroyed my faith in human nature!" Then he told her all.





CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAUGHT.

“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

QUON the evening of that very day when Mr. Brookland had gone up to town and made his series of unpleasant discoveries, Joel Craig, unconscious of danger, and secure in the perfection of his arrangements, sat picking walnuts and drinking sherry in his handsomely-furnished rooms in Harley Street. He had a keen appreciation of all the refinements and elegancies of life, and indulged in them freely, as they cost him nothing. His apartments were, therefore, arranged and decorated with great care, and filled with every luxury his heart desired; in fact, they were exactly suited to satisfy the requirements of a man of wealth and position, as he was supposed to be. The rich curtains were drawn across the window to shut out, as far as possible, the sound of the wind and rain. A clear bright fire burnt in the burnished grate, and ensconced in a luxurious chair, Joel Craig lounged lazily before it, with a cigar between his lips, gazing into the glowing caverns the red coal made—perhaps seeing pictures there.

He was evidently going a journey, for his luggage, not a great deal of it, was packed, and stood in a corner ready for removal. He was going to turn his back upon the old life and begin a new. This was his last night in the old land, and he sat there, with his curtains closely drawn,

before the cosy fire, thinking. It was not often he troubled himself to think as he was thinking now. He was generally scheming, plotting, and planning for the future ; but there are times when the past will thrust itself on the mind even of such a man as he, and compel him to look upon its face ; whether it smiles or frowns, or brings him pleasant reminiscences, or painful memories, depends entirely on the way he has used it. The face it showed Joel Craig at the present hour was not a pleasant one ; not that he felt he had misused it, quite the contrary, he fancied it had greatly misused him.

It must always be a painful thing for a man to feel at war with his own species, even when there is only an occasional encounter between them ; but to carry on perpetual warfare within one's own breast, to rebel with the whole soul's bitterness against the hand that feeds, the home that shelters us, must be a wretched and unenviable state to live in, nay, a very hell itself. Yet he had so lived all his life long ; watching, waiting, holding his hatred back in a leash of smiles, not for a day, but for months and years, till the opportunity came, and he let it slip. The spring was made, and it fastened upon the heart of the man he hated—the man his mother had loved—and dragged him down through a slough of infamy and disgrace, to where he lay now, and whence he could never, never rise again. He was satisfied with the success of his complicated scheme of vengeance ; yet with all his satisfaction there mingled some alloy. There was still one tender spot in Joel Craig's nature, and that was the memory of his dead mother. He had loved her passionately, and though so many years had passed away, her memory was fresh and dear to him as ever. Man though he was, he remembered the touch of her kind hands, and in imagination could feel her soft kisses still, and see her face as she taught him his prayers,—“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”

Well, all he had done, he had done for love of her. He thought of *him*, of the man she had loved—whom he had destroyed—thought of him in many phases of life, and saw him, in his mind's eye, coming out, with his proud, firm step, from the church doors with his bride upon his arm ! The old thought, the old pain, cramped his heart now as

then. It was all so plain to his senses, it seemed to have been but yesterday—he forgot nothing. There are some things a man never forgets. He remembered the colour of the dresses, the sound of the church bells, and the glowing sunlight that streamed over all! All these thoughts and things flashed upon his mind. Then came the present, and he saw the grey-headed, proud old man breaking stones in the prison yard—even as the son he had disowned had broken his pride and shivered his honour to atoms. He wondered if his fair-haired mother could look down and see the lover of her youth, the father of her son, ruined, old helpless, lost! It was not a pleasant thought. He might put seas and continents between himself and these things, but he knew they would follow him wheresoever he went, and that on the restless waves of his mind the grey ruined head of the man he hated would be constantly floating side by side with the white, pitying face of the mother he loved. He was thinking these thoughts and seeing these pictures as he stared into the red glowing fire.

“Pshaw!” he thought, “it is childish to think of things in this fashion.”

He got up, lighted another cigar, poured out fresh wine, and sent his thoughts out in a new direction. He had worked out his own revenge, and enjoyed it to repletion; but now that the passion and excitement of his life was over, had burnt itself out, he began to think he might have done better. He was not sorry, not repentant for what he had done, but sorry he had had to do it. For, after all, what had he gained save the bare luxury of revenge? Nothing. When the old man lost his honour, he had lost his home, and all the solid advantages of his life, and been compelled to live upon his wits—and they had served him well. He brightened up and grew cheerful as he thought of kind, easy Mr. Brookland, who had so readily allowed himself to be plundered without reserve. Joel Craig had lived now for many months on the funds of the imaginary Gas Company, which were supplied by his unsuspecting friend, and had been “enjoying life,” as it is called, entering upon every scene of dissipation and excitement, buying every spurious pleasure that could be bought with money. He dispensed his old friend’s cash with an unscrupulous hand; but he knew he

was getting to the end of his tether ; he could not go much further, the bubble must soon burst, and then——Well, at one time he had considered a marriage with Margaret Brookland as a thing by no means improbable. He knew that her father would make no objection, and though at one time he had thought it would be a difficult task to win Margaret herself, yet it was one that he might hope to accomplish. He was wiser now ; he had watched her well, and knew it would be as impossible for him to win her heart as to gain her hand without it.

He had been compelled to look out for a fresh field of action. He had reaped a tolerably good harvest from Mr. Brookland's credulous, trusting spirit. There would be no more gold gathering down at Brooklands. What should he do? What should be his next move? He had pondered over these things again and again, but could resolve on nothing, until Mr. Brookland's illness. Then, in the belief that he was dying, and would never rise from that sick-bed again, he made up his mind to sweep away the whole of his available property by a grand *coup de main*. He was an adept at copying handwriting, and found no difficulty whatever in imitating Mr. Brookland's signature, and drawing his balance of five thousand pounds out of the hands of his bankers, as it has already been stated. He comforted himself for any little qualms of conscience he might have felt, by reflecting that, after all, he was doing nobody any real harm. Miss Brookland would be rich enough, and never miss the paltry five thousand, and her father could never carry it into the grave with him ; and to the grave he was surely going ; he would not live to discover the fraud, and deny his signature. However, it was with much chagrin he watched the old man's slow recovery, and from the moment he rose from his bed Joel Craig's anxieties began.

He had got the money, it was true, but he did not feel safe so long as he remained on British ground, and he decided to leave it as soon as he possibly could. So far he had succeeded well. His plans for the future had been well digested and admirably arranged. He intended to leave for Holland the next day, remain there for a time, and then start for a Continental tour, and enjoy life in foreign lands. He had a strong intention of taking a trip

over to America, his natural desire to visit that wonderful country having been greatly increased by his reading, in fact studying, that extraordinary work "New America," which had just appeared, and taken the literary world by storm. Indeed his desire had grown to be an irresistible longing; he felt that thither he must go. Once in America, he would make a pilgrimage over the Rocky Mountains to the great Salt Lake City, and take a peep at life among the Mormons. He sat there cogitating very pleasantly on what he would do, in that brilliant future that was opening before him. He could keep his wits for his own amusement and advancement; he would no longer depend upon them for his daily bread. There need be no more dirty work to be done, no more scheming and plotting. He had got plenty of money, and he knew, or thought he knew, that a man of his good looks and versatile talent would find no difficulty in getting into society abroad; especially as he held a golden key. And he made up his mind to marry the first girl who was beautiful, accomplished, and rich, and had the good taste to fall in love with him. Then he would settle down, and perhaps turn his attention to politics, and devote his diplomatic talents to the legislation of the United States.

A very pleasant castle to build; and he had built it in the airiest of situations. While he was still occupied in decorating it with pleasant thoughts, there was a gentle tap at the door; and in obedience to his carelessly-uttered "Come in," two bland, decorous-looking gentlemen entered, cast a rapid glance on him and his surroundings, and one, with a look of polite inquiry, said,—

"Mr. Joel Craig, I believe?"

His guilty spirit recognised danger in the quiet aspect of his visitors; but he prepared to parry their attack with a careless smile, as glancing at his watch, he said,—

"No. My friend Craig left me about an hour ago. He's far on his way to Brighton by this time." He kept puffing away at his cigar while he was speaking.

"Indeed," replied one. "I am sorry for that. We had particular business with him."

"Had you? Well, thank God, I've no particular business with anybody. It was rather cool of him to run away and leave me to finish the bottle by myself. It is decent

wine though. Will you take a glass? And by-the-bye, if you want Craig's address, I can give it you."

"I admire *your* address, Mr. Craig," replied the officer. "Come, come, it is no use to say you are not the man. We know you better than you know us; and we want you for that little banking business at Stevenson and Salt's. Here's our warrant. We have got a cab below, so you may as well come quiet."

Joel Craig began to protest he was not the man they wanted; and to threaten them with the vengeance of the law if they presumed to interfere with his liberty. But they stopped him, saying,—

"We are ready to run the risk of taking the wrong man; and if you are the wrong man, we shall never get the right one. Best come, and quickly. Save whatever you've got to say for them as can make use on it."

Joel Craig's heart sank like a lump of lead in his breast. He saw his keen wits would avail him nothing against those keener wits which had been sharpened by a whole life's contact with men like himself, who had outwitted themselves at last.

The castle he had been building, an hour ago, fell to the ground like a house of cards raised by a child's hand, rather than by a man's brain. There was no escape. Joel Craig was in the hands of the law at last!





CHAPTER XL.

IN THE YELDON TUNNEL.

“Come what may after death to men,
What thing worth this will the dead years breed?
Lose life, lose all, but at least I know,
Oh, sweet life’s love! having loved you so,
Had I reached you on earth I should lose not again,
In death nor in life, in dream nor in deed.”



AUL WYNTER’S legal business took him frequently to the offices of Messrs. Stevenson and Salt, and through them he heard of Joel Craig’s arrest. His first thought was for Margaret, whom he believed to be the affianced wife of this guilty man. How would she, how could she bear this terrible blow? It might kill her; or she might live on with a heart half broken with grief and shame. Oh! if he could bear it for her!—if he could have doubled, nay, trebled his own burthen and lightened hers, his brave heart would have borne it gladly. But there was no time to waste in grieving, or thinking on that which was impossible. He would have time enough to grieve for her all his life long. He must act now; and his practical mind cast about to see what could be done.

He would write at once to Mr. Brookland, and tell him that he was ready to refund the money. He would employ counsel—the best that was to be had—gather together the cream of wisdom from the astutest legal minds, try all means to prove the truth a lie, and find some crevice, some loop-

hole in the law, through which this most guilty man might creep out stainless and free—and all for Margaret's sake! His brain throbbed with the fullness of thought. He called for the time-table, looked at his watch. One moment he was inclined to rush down to Brooklands, and talk the matter over. Then he changed his mind. No, he would not. He could not bear to see her face as he pictured it—tear-stained, grief-stricken, and for another, and that other——. Well, he could have forgiven all the bitter misery he had himself endured, but he could not forgive him for the sorrow he had brought on *her*. He found now how much easier it is to bear our own afflictions than the grief of those we love, which we have no power to lighten.

He thought it wisest to write to Mr. Brookland, and he did so, expressing in the warmest terms his sympathy with him in this great unexpected sorrow. Moreover, he would like, he said, to co-operate with him in any measures that could be taken in favour of this unfortunate man, Mr. Craig; but he spoke no word of Margaret, though he longed to say how his heart bled for her. This letter chanced to be handed to Mr. Brookland as he and Margaret were about starting for London; for the late course of events necessitated his constant going up and down, and she insisted on accompanying him.

He read the letter attentively, and then handed it to Margaret, saying but few words; but a few words from Mr. Brookland meant more than many words from most men.

"He is a noble, generous fellow! Margaret, he little thinks how much he owes to Joel Craig."

Margaret's cheek flushed as she heard those few brief words of admiration for Paul Wynter.

"Oh! papa," she answered, "if he owed all the misery of his life, as perhaps he does, to Mr. Craig, it would not influence him in the least. He is too noble to bear malice, especially when his enemy is in need of mercy. He has suffered so much himself, that he is full of compassion even for the self-made trouble of the wicked."

"But there is something in the tone of this letter that I do not quite understand," said Mr. Brookland, conning it over again. "He writes as though he were sympathising

with us upon some great family affliction. His words are simple and few, but strong. He 'feels for our sorrow as though it were his own,' and offers to refund the five thousand pounds. Why, the loss of that falls legally on the bankers, though, of course, I shall share it. Hear what he says: 'Would to heaven that double or treble five thousand pounds could lift the cloud from your hearts—the shadow from your home!' What can he mean? I really do not understand it."

Margaret did not understand it either. Mr. Brookland paused for a moment, and then added, in a troubled voice,—

"It is not often I have cause to blush and feel ashamed, but I do now, when I remember how unworthily I behaved to Mr. Wynter. You always took his part—you valued him aright."

Margaret's heart leaped for joy as this tardy self-condemnation fell from her father's lips. Yes, she had indeed always valued him aright.

Arrived in London, Mr. Brookland drove Margaret to their own house in Curzon Street, which was now ready to receive them. They were to remain there that night, and return to Brooklands the next day—at least, they proposed to do so, but sometimes they protracted their stay from one day to many. He wrote to Paul Wynter, who, notwithstanding his better fortune, still occupied his old lodgings in Pentonville, thanking him most heartily for his letter, and asking him to meet them the next day, at a stated hour, at the station, and give them the pleasure of his company for a few days at Brooklands, when they could talk the matter over at their leisure. He posted the letter on his way to Lincoln's Inn. On inquiring for Mr. Stevenson, the senior partner, he learnt that, at the present moment, he was engaged.

"Very well, I'll wait," he answered, and was shown into the ante-room, which, to his surprise, he found already occupied by the man he desired to see, by Paul Wynter himself. Of course there were exclamations of surprise and pleasure from both. The two clasped hands with the warm strong clasp that had not been between them since the old happy days at Brooklands.

"I wrote to you yesterday," began Paul.

"And I received your letter at once," said Mr. Brookland, interrupting him, "and answered it about an hour ago."

"I hope you do not consider me intrusive," rejoined Paul, looking with wistful earnestness in his face; "but I cannot help taking an interest in anything that concerns Brooklands, especially in such a case as this. I would give all I possess in the world to undo this wretched business. I—I sympathise with you more than I can express." He could not help his voice faltering, for his thoughts flew to Margaret.

"I thank you with all my heart," replied Mr. Brookland, as he wrung his hand; "but I do not deserve your sympathy or regard. I denied *you* both in your sorest need. I have felt my injustice for a long time past; but I have wanted the opportunity, perhaps the courage, to own it."

"Don't speak of it, pray," replied Paul, with some emotion; "believe me, I never blamed you. Indeed, considering all circumstances, you could not well have done otherwise."

"I am not going to excuse myself," rejoined Mr. Brookland, "but I had, or fancied I had, cause to distrust you. I received your caution with suspicion, though your warning has been more than fulfilled. Indeed, I behaved atrociously to you in all ways, and I beg your pardon heartily. Let us bring the old times back again. I have suffered from a false friend, I shall now know how to value the true."

They clasped hands once more, and with more feeling than can well be conveyed in words, Mr. Brookland continued—

"Margaret always took your part. Women have a quicker perception in most things than men; and it has not been the least part of my punishment to read my condemnation in the eyes of my own child."

Paul suddenly took courage, and asked, with as much calmness as he could assume,—

"How is Miss Brookland? I dare hardly ask how she bears this blow."

"Bears it!" repeated Mr. Brookland, puzzled no less by his tone than by the anxious expression of his face. "Well, of course she regrets it very much; but she is not greatly

surprised. She had always an unfavourable opinion of Mr. Craig."

"An un—unfavourable opinion!" repeated Paul, bewildered in his turn. "You surprise me. I do not quite understand."

"Well," replied Mr. Brookland, smiling, "there is surely nothing very surprising in a lady having an aversion, even from such an attractive and handsome man as I admit Mr. Craig to be."

"But I understood—I was told—that you had allowed Miss Brookland to engage herself to marry him."

Mr. Brookland did not think proper to enlighten Paul Wynter as to what his secret feelings had been in the matter, but he answered quietly,—

"Whoever told you that was grossly mistaken. In spite of his brilliant qualities and dashing manners, she never liked him; and only tolerated him because I called him my friend."

"Thank God! thank God for that!" exclaimed Paul Wynter, in thrilling tones; and such a radiant expression broke over his countenance, all the passionate love, the hidden fire of his life flashed up into his face, as when the sky suddenly opens and the lightning leaps out.

Mr. Brookland's senses were for the moment electrified. He caught a glimpse of that which had so long been carefully concealed. He remembered Margaret's words, "A woman needs a true, brave heart to lean upon," and he acknowledged now that the world contained no heart so true, so brave, and strong as that which beat in Paul Wynter's breast. A tender smile broke over the old man's face as he said,—

"I hardly know if Margaret will forgive you for encouraging such a suspicion against her. However, when we have transacted our business here, perhaps you will walk with me to Curzon Street, where my daughter now is, and try to make your peace with her."

Paul Wynter most gratefully accepted this welcome invitation. They got through their interview with the lawyers as speedily as possible, then walked together arm-in-arm to that paradise which was at the present moment occupied by the goddess Margaret.

"I have brought an old friend to see you," said Mr. Brookland, as he entered the room, followed by Paul Wynter, "and I have promised him a welcome in your name."

Margaret looked up, and a soft warm blush suffused her cheeks when she saw who was her father's companion. She came forward and received him most cordially, saying,—

"I am rejoiced to see you once more. I thought we should never meet again."

Her softened glance, and the pleasant ring in her voice, told him plainly enough that she had not uttered her welcome as a matter of course—her gladness was self-evident. Paul Wynter was so thoroughly aglow with the unexpected joy that had fallen upon him, that his usually great conversational powers seemed to have deserted him. He would fain have sat quiet, basking in the sunshine her mere presence made for him, but Mr. Brookland gave a fillip to the conversation, and it soon began to flow as easily as in the old days. Margaret's low rippling laughter, and her fresh young voice, occasionally broke in upon their graver tones.

Paul Wynter was raised to a very heaven of delight; he seemed to be sitting in fairyland, and Margaret made the scene of enchantment. All she said and did was in such a frank, sweet, gracious way; there was an indescribable softness and subtle grace thrown into her whole bearing. Her undisguised pleasure at seeing him made itself apparent in everything. The moments seemed to fly. They sat chatting round the luncheon-table in a pleasant, easy way, though it would be difficult even to give a skeleton sketch of the conversation. It was illuminated by no particular flashes of wit, weighted with no grave discussions, yet the whole of that enchanted hour—looks, tones, thoughts, and feelings—would be well remembered when witty sayings would have flashed and died out, and wise discussions have fallen to the ground and been forgotten. No doubt we have all passed some of our happiest hours in this pleasant social way, in agreeable talk about "nothing" in particular.

It was with some difficulty Paul Wynter at last summoned courage to rise and take his leave.

"Remember, you are pledged to meet us at the station at

one o'clock to-morrow, and spend as much time with us at Brooklands as you can possibly spare."

"Lucy will be so glad to see you," said Margaret, as she gave him her hand at parting. "She is never tired of talking of your goodness in their time of trouble. It was like you, so thoughtful and kind of you to let the poor boy know he had won the prize before he died!"

"Such small things are not worth remembering," replied Paul Wynter. "I loved the boy, and the little trouble I took was for pure love's sake."

They exchanged a kind "good-bye" for the present, and he was again reminded of the morrow. When, at last, he found himself in the street, he seemed to be walking upon air. He never knew until this day how much of hope had mingled with the one grand passion of his life. It was with the greatest difficulty he could tame down his thoughts to go through the day's business. He seemed to have imbibed some subtle essence, that made his blood rush careeringly through his veins, and his heart dance within his breast. The grey leaden clouds that had seemed to be closing round him, were tinged with *couleur de rose*; he began to think that, even for him, there might be something beautiful in life. At the present moment one great thought overpowered all the rest. He had seen her that day, and would see her again upon the morrow!

The morning came, and he was early astir. He went his prison round, and managed to speak a few words to his father, explaining that he might be absent two or three days, but that his old friend Dr. Chapman would take his place.

"I shall be very glad to see him," said the old man, testily. "He is more considerate than you are, Paul. He stays with me longer, and cheers me up. He seems to think I shall live to get out of this place, and go out free into the world again."

Old, degraded, ruined as he was, it was piteous to see how he clung to life, and longed to be "out in the world again."

Paul Wynter arrived at the station a few minutes before the appointed time, and made his way along the crowded platform, casting searching glances among the different groups, till at last he distinguished Mr. and Miss Brookland,

both looking expectantly round in search of him. He hurried forward and joined them.

"You are punctuality personified," said Mr. Brookland, greeting him with the utmost cordiality. "In five minutes the train starts. I have taken the *coupé*, so we can get into our seats as soon as we please."

"I hope I have not kept you waiting," said Paul.

"Not at all. I have only just had time to take the tickets, and buy this packet of waste-paper for Margaret to amuse herself with during the journey."

He pointed, as he spoke, to a bundle of magazines he was carrying.

"You see I have taken care to fortify myself against dullness," said Margaret, gaily, as she took her seat; and Paul had the supreme felicity of arranging the warm rugs round her, and doing all the little preliminaries called "making comfortable," before the train started. He glanced at the gaily-illuminated covers of the books. He took one in his hand.

"It might, perhaps, be more truly said that you are provoking the attack," he answered, smiling. "Now, look here, I cut the leaves haphazard, and the first thing I find is a paper on the 'Rights of Women!' Now, what possible amusement can you find in that?"

"Ah! I see you are one of the noble sex, who want to keep us down!" returned Margaret. "You are determined we shall not climb to a seat in the House of Commons, or even have a vote in your elections."

"On the contrary, I would give you a free vote, and right to elect one—and your will should be supreme—but he should be elected for life."

"Well, I am glad you give us leave to carry on some operations in our own proper sphere, narrow though it be."

"And what true woman would like to step out of her *proper* sphere?" said Paul. "But I deny its narrowness. It extends from one end of the land to the other, from the throne to the palace; and her influence follows, sometimes guides us, from the cradle to the grave. I consider women as the makers of great men, who are moulded and shaped at home, and sent out prepared for the world's great business. After all, it is far nobler work to encourage and fit mankind

for the labour of life, than to step forward and take his place in it. Though you are smiling, I am sure you agree with me."

"Of course she does," rejoined Mr. Brookland, "only she likes to seem to differ. Margaret, my dear child, you should not speak equivocally on those subjects. Mr. Wynter may think you are one of those he women who ——"

"Well, and if he does, I shall pity his want of penetration—that's all," said Margaret, interrupting him.

"And if I were mad enough to suppose that you *could* do anything that was not pure and womanly, I should richly deserve your pity—that pity which is nearest to contempt."

Mr. Brookland, having broken off for a moment resumed his study of the *Times*, while they were whirling away through some of the prettiest pastoral country in England; past wood-crowned hills, and pleasant dales, dotted here and there with picturesque villages and thriving farms. Occasionally they came upon a quaint old town, lying dreamily in the valley. But they paid little attention to the prospect, and scarcely once glanced out of the window. Some of the old theorising spirit that used to beguile the hours at Brooklands awoke within them as they flew along on wings of fire, discussing matters of feeling and sentimental ideas of right and wrong. Suddenly, as they flew past a small temporary station, Margaret looked out of the window, then at her father, saying—

"Have you taken tickets for Yeldon, papa?"

"Yes, I thought you would not mind it this once," he answered. "We save twenty miles, and that is a great consideration."

"I did not know you had two stations for Brooklands?" inquired Paul. "That is something new, is it not?"

"No," replied Mr. Brookland, "it has been open some years, though I do not often use it. The line runs through B——, which, as you know, is a great manufacturing town, and goes on to Yeldon, which is not above half a mile further from Brooklands than the regular station. We have, therefore, five minutes longer carriage driving, and certainly save twenty miles rail."

"That says a great deal in favour of Yeldon," said Paul.

"If I was left to myself I should always use it, but Mar-

garet does not like it. She is afraid of the tunnel," observed Mr. Brookland.

"What, like the children, afraid in the dark?" said Paul, looking at Margaret with a bright smile.

"Oh! but it is not a common tunnel, nor yet an especially long one—not much more than a mile, I believe; but I do not like it. It is bad enough at any time to rush into the bowels of the earth, and be buried five minutes of your life; but this is especially horrible to me. Just as you pass B——, there is a monster reservoir, containing I do not know how many tons of water, and they have tunnelled under that, and I don't like the idea of it. Hundreds of people won't travel that way for the same reason."

"Why? Because you do not like the idea of it?"

"No, but because clever engineers have said that an accident might happen at any time; especially after heavy rains," replied Margaret.

"Those clever engineers ought to have added, that accidents might happen anywhere," observed Paul, "either under the reservoir or over it, in the public streets or in your own chamber, at your rising up or sitting down. If you only knew your own anatomy, you would be afraid to move hand or foot, and live in daily dread of putting some portion of the delicate machinery of life out of order."

From the machinery of the body they drifted to the still more wonderful machinery of the mind. The conversation was carried on chiefly between Mr. Brookland and Paul. They had both studied much and thought more, and liked to exchange opinions, and argue out their own ideas.

Meanwhile, Margaret leaned back silently in the carriage, half listening, catching odd words and phrases, and looking dreamily out of the window. Presently she leaned forward, exclaiming—

"Look, Mr. Wynter, that is B——, to your left."

He glanced in the direction she intimated, and saw a very wilderness of bricks and mortar, with huge high chimneys rising out from among them, belching out vast volumes of black smoke, and sending it rolling and curling in heavy masses over the town, enveloping it in an atmosphere of dim-coloured earth-made clouds. They dashed past it, and Margaret said,—

"We are getting close to the tunnel." The fiery monster gave a shrill shriek as she added, "And now we are in it!"

They all relapsed into silence, compulsory, of course, for what human voice could be heard in an atmosphere of compressed thunder?

Suddenly they fancied the train was slackening its speed. It was evidently labouring up a steep incline, and went slower and slower. The snorting breath of the engine grew louder and louder, till it seemed to groan under its task.

"We seem to be almost standing still," said Mr. Brookland.

Paul put his head out of the window and saw nothing but blank utter darkness in front of them; but the light of day still lingered at the mouth of the tunnel behind them, and he said anxiously,—

"I do not see anything or anybody; but I fancy we are backing slowly, very slowly, out of the tunnel." Even as he spoke the darkness became alive with lights, with cries and shouts, and hysterical shrieks of women. The guards seemed to be dashing frantically about from place to place, and the piercing screams of the engine, which seemed to labour in agony, and labour in vain, added to the dire confusion and the terror of the darkness.

Margaret was frightened, but said nothing. Paul Wynter spoke cheerfully, and re-assured her; at the same time admitting that he feared there was something wrong with the reservoir.

"There is no occasion for any alarm—we are backing towards the town," he whispered close in her ear. "Don't be afraid—it will be all right presently."

"No, we are standing still," she answered slowly; and a white frozen look stole over her face. And hark! a noise as though all heaven's thunder had burst in upon them! Was it fancy? No, it was no fancy, the voice of fire was quenched in the deafening roar of the water, and the shouts of men and the cries of women were drowned and still.

Even under common circumstances, a stoppage in a tunnel is alarming, to say the least of it, when people can look out and talk to one another, and pass questions and answers from one end of the train to the other, till the guard comes and sets their minds at rest. But here the

roar of the water drowned all sounds. The passengers could hold no communication with one another. The suspense was terrible! Every moment—nay, every second seemed an age. In vain Paul Wynter looked out, and peered again into the darkness. There was nothing to be seen but the guard's flickering light, nothing to be heard but the deafening voice of the water. There was nothing to be done—absolutely nothing. They must sit still and wait. He held Margaret's hand, and from time to time pressed it with an assuring clasp. Presently a quick sharp cry burst from her lips—

“Ah! it's coming!—it's coming in upon us! See!”

He looked down. The bottom of the carriage was filled with water.

“It is gaining upon us, and *we* are standing still! Keep your eyes fixed there, and you will see how fast it is coming.”

He fastened his eyes upon the spot she indicated. Yes, she was right, the water was creeping higher and higher. It was gaining upon them fast! It was an inch deeper already! They looked on one another in silent consternation. At the same moment a bright light was thrown into the carriage from without, and a dark face appeared at the window and looked in upon them. It was the guard.

“It is all over,” he said briefly. But there was an expression of mute despair upon his swarthy features.

“What is all over? What has happened?” asked Mr. Brookland, anxiously.

“The reservoir has burst, and is rushing down upon us, as you may hear and see. Our fire's out, and we can't make head against it.”

“Reverse the engine and back into the town,” said Paul Wynter, promptly. “For God's sake do something!”

“We have done all we can do. We slid back as far as we could; but the earth's fallen in behind, and blocked us in; and the water's pouring down upon us in front. There's no hope. We shall be drowned like rats in a hole!”

“Is it impossible to swim?—for a good swimmer to swim out with a lady?”

It was a mad question to ask, but in moments of extreme terror men do and say mad things. The guard in answer

turned his light downwards, with the mere monosyllable "Look." Paul looked out, and saw the black water, like a seething cauldron, boiling and bubbling below. As the guard stood upon the steps, the water reached almost to his waist.

"There's awful scenes going on!—the ladies screaming and praying!—the gentlemen storming like mad!—they won't die quiet! But we must die, all on us. I got a wife and little 'uns at home as'll miss me." His voice trembled, and he added quietly, "We're used to danger, but it don't often come like this. God bless you, Sir! Shake hands. You're the last livin' face I'll see. God help us all!" The dark face and the light together disappeared in the darkness.

In all great crises, either wild frenzy or a solemn calm takes possession of the human mind. When fate is unassailable, it is no use to attempt to struggle against it; and those who had so lately been full of hope and life, sat there now looking calmly on the face of death. With Mr. Brookland and Paul Wynter it was the calm of resignation. With Margaret it was the calm of despair. Her father embraced her fondly.

"My darling! my child!" he said, "I have prayed that when I died I might take you with me; but I little thought my prayer would be answered so soon. But God knows best. I am old, and could not have hoped to live much longer."

A cry broke from Margaret's lips—

"But I am young. I might have been so happy!"

"Turn your thoughts to God, my poor child. Pray. You will see Him soon."

"I can't—I can't pray!" she moaned, shivering, as she crept nearer to Paul Wynter.

The water was rising rapidly—it reached already to the seats of the carriages. He put his arms round her, and drew her nearer, and clasped her closer and tighter, till her fair head rested on his breast. There was no need for reserve now; they were dying—dying in the full richness and strength of life.

All worldly distinctions, circumstances, and conventionalities that had placed a seal upon their lips, a barrier

between their souls, passed away. The world itself lay far off, like a land of shadows, as they sat there in the darkness of life, watching and waiting for the darkness of death. But they were not afraid. Paul Wynter was even brave, and strong, and happy—yes, happy; for in that last hour he realised the might of his own love, and knew that he was loved back again; and he held the life and glory of his life in his arms, gathered close to his breast, and his dark curls mingled with her soft golden hair as he bent his head and rained sweet cheering words upon her, and tried to keep her thoughts and her eyes from the cruel water that had crept up nearly to her waist.

“Don’t look down, Margaret, my love—my own,” he whispered, and his very words were a caress. “Fix your eyes on mine, and let our last looks be upon each other. Who knows—who can tell, my darling, the love that is too late for this world may ripen in another?”

He gathered her closer and nearer still, to keep her until the last moment, till he was forced to give her up. Her soft hands clung to his neck, and her sweet eyes gave him back love for love. A strange longing for life mingled with the dread of death.

“You are not afraid, love?” he murmured from time to time.

“No,” she answered, and a slight shiver ran through her delicate frame—“not afraid; but oh! if we could live!—if we could only live! We might have been so happy, and I would have loved you so well—so dearly!” For a second her fair face radiated as she said—“Thank God you are with me! Will it be long?” and her voice trembled in his ear.

“No, dearest—not long.”

He shuddered to think how soon—how very soon the end must come—shuddered, not for himself, but for her. He could not bear to think of her dainty beauty being bathed and shrouded in the muddy water. For himself he cared nothing; it was not hard to die now. He had tasted the full bitterness of life, and it seemed now that the essence of all joy, all human felicity, had been extracted and compressed into one sweet draught, and given to him now at the last; and it was strong and potent, for it warmed his blood, fired

his brain, and made his heart strong. Never, under the brightest aspect could she be, or have ever been, so entirely his own as now. The world had no part in her—no eyes but his could look upon her; she was hidden away from the air of heaven, and from the light of day—from all, from everything, hidden in his arms—in his heart! He wondered what the world would think when it looked in upon this dark, cruel work, and found them drowned and dead, clasped in each other's arms! A few minutes only could in reality have passed since they had learned their fate, but it seemed like hours. Every scene in his life where she had borne a part passed before him. He saw her as he had first beheld her, in the rugged mountain pass, as white and still as now; again, in the pleasant woods at Brooklands, full of girlish gaiety, the sunlight shimmering on her golden hair; and yet again, in the London streets, under the gas lights, the wind and the rain beating down upon her pale, anxious face; and now—well, now she was in his arms, and he smiled upon her, and held her fast. Once or twice Mr. Brookland had spoken, and he spoke again.

"Margaret, my child, come to me—let me hold you in my arms once more."

"Hush!" said Paul Wynter. "I think she has fainted. It would be cruel to bring her back to face these horrors. For her, at least, the last will be peace—thank God!" and he held her fast still. Once, when he looked down upon the pure, calm face, he dreaded lest consciousness might return at the last moment, and disturb and terrify her mind. He would lay her gently back, he thought, and let the water close over her in peace. Yet—no, he could not part from her. He listened to the roaring water without, and watched it creeping in higher and higher, hungry to kill. His eyes seemed to grow dizzy, his brain to reel, with the intensity of his fixed gaze upon the water.

Suddenly he heard a loud boom, as though a cannon had been fired in their midst. And was it fancy? He stooped forward and strained his eyes. No, it was no fancy. The water was going down! He watched—he listened. Yes, the water was still decreasing, and its deafening roar was changed to a rushing sound. He could hear shouts and voices, and they moved slowly; but yet they moved at last!

He never spoke. He was afraid to hope, but he felt his heart give one bound, and then beat a quick regular beat. He looked out, and saw light behind them. The weight of the waters had broken through the earth that had fallen and impeded them, and the way was clear for them to back into the town. Until that moment Paul Wynter had fancied he was content to die ; but then all the longing for life rose strong within him, so strong that its very strength amounted to agony. His darling might be recalled to life now ; and in a very delirium of joy he almost shrieked her name.

"Margaret! Margaret! look up!" But not an eyelid quivered. She was still, and cold as marble. A nameless terror crept over him. He chafed her hands, breathed upon her forehead, and laid her cold face close to his warm heart. In the dread of losing her he almost lost himself. He called aloud for help, though he knew such cries would be unavailing. They still moved, but slowly—oh! so slowly!

Her heart still beat, though her pulse was low and languid ; but he clasped her close, and kept her warm—even with the warmth of his own life. The light still crept in upon their darkness, and in another moment they glided out into the full blaze of day. Crowds of people had assembled on the banks at the mouth of the tunnel, and frantic excitement prevailed as the huge monster crawled out with its living freight, "back from the jaws of death." Roused perhaps by the din and confusion, Margaret opened her eyes at last.

"Saved! Saved!" exclaimed Paul Wynter. And he who had borne all the misery of life, the loss of fame, name, and honour, without a tear, wept now, ay, wept like a very child, but wept for joy!





CHAPTER XLI.

CONCLUSION.

“And when the world is born again,
And with some fair love, side by side,
Thou wanderest 'twixt the sun and rain
In that fresh love-begetting tide;
Then when the world is born again,
And the sweet year before thee lies,
Shall thy heart think of coming pain,
Or vex itself with memories?”

“WELL, this is a queer world, that I must say. Everything seems to me to be turning topsyturvy. So Margaret really is engaged to be married to Mr. Wynter; who, it appears, is not Mr. Wynter, but somebody else. Dear Margaret! I cannot at all account for her extraordinary infatuation. It is utterly beyond my comprehension!”

The speaker was Mrs. Creamly. She and Lucy were lingering over the breakfast-table, which Margaret had quitted but a moment before. Lucy looked pale and sad in her mourning dress. Truly, she was mourning for the living as well as for the dead. Her heart was full almost to bursting. She felt a longing, a craving for that sympathy which she dared not claim. She hid the secret of her ruined love in her own heart. She would never tell the history of her lost love, her humiliation, her disappointment to any man, or woman either. Her heart ached with its heavy burthen, but

she tried to bear it bravely. She sat opposite to Mrs. Creamly, listening to her remarks with a pained expression of countenance, letting her run on till she paused to take breath ; sometimes replying, as she replied now to her last observation, "One can never tell why this person loves that, and does not love the other. Love is a great mystery, and beyond our human comprehension altogether."

"If she had only taken a fancy to Mr. Craig," continued Mrs. Creamly, "I could have understood that perfectly. He was such a fine handsome fellow—so clever and so agreeable ! Who could have expected he would have turned out such a villain ? They say the case will be concluded to-day. I do hope he will be found guilty."

"What can it matter to you whether he is found guilty or not ?" exclaimed Lucy angrily. "He has never done you any harm !"

"Indeed, my dear, I think he has done me a great deal of harm," she answered.

"How ?"

"In presuming to put himself on a social equality with me, even for an hour. He ought to be punished for that as well as for other things. I only wish I was the judge, and had the right to pass sentence upon him—the wicked swindling impostor !"

"He is sorry for what he has done ; he can do no more than repent," said Lucy.

"Nor no less," replied Mrs. Creamly sharply. "Every man repents when he gets to the end of his tether. After doing all sorts of wickedness that can never be undone, he sets to work and repents as hard as he has sinned."

"I believe his repentance is honest and sincere," said Lucy with a weary sigh. "If he could live his life again, I daresay things would be different."

"I daresay nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Creamly impatiently. "Such men as he never repent till they have lost the power of sinning. You may call it repentance, my dear—I call it softening of the brain."

"Well, those he has most injured are anxious to shield him ; and I pray heartily the verdict may be 'not guilty,' and he may escape."

But though Paul Wynter made every exertion on his be-

half, engaged the best men to plead for him—and they pleaded well—yet Joel Craig did not escape. Strange to say, he was condemned to penal servitude, and sent to the very prison where the old man he had ruined was languishing still.

Paul Wynter had not communicated any of the facts of Joel Craig's doings to his father. It was no use to excite and harass him on such a matter. Besides, the subject of Joel Craig was a painful one. His name had never been mentioned between them since the day when the old man had tacitly admitted that Joel Craig was his disowned son. Paul knew well enough that, in spite of his evil doings, the old man's heart clung to the boy who had been "so handsome and so strong."

The day came when Joel Craig, shorn of the locks of which he had been so proud, was to enter the stone-yard and labour, a prisoner among prisoners. But he was strong and bold, and resolved to look his position steadily in the face. He knew that, by a system of good conduct, he could reduce the term of his imprisonment to exactly one-half. He looked on the matter philosophically. After all, he had been enjoying a luxurious living for the last year or more, and he must now pay the penalty; and he resolved to pay it with a cheerful spirit. His degradation did not touch him very keenly. He had no honourable station to lose, no good name to forfeit, no kindly kindred to regret or grieve for him.

There was but one thing he dreaded, and that was the sight of the friend and father he had injured. He had seen him often—nay, saw him often still in his mind's eye, as he had last beheld him, standing in the dock with a scared face and broken heart, his grey head bowed with the shame that was on it. Blazing with hatred, he had himself stood forth and borne witness against him. As their eyes met, the old man's cry of anguish and amazement rung in his ears still! He had a superstitious dread of seeing that face again. He shuddered and turned cold at the thought which literally haunted him; and when he closed his eyes to sleep, it seemed to be beside him on his pillow, staring at him with pale, hollow eyes, but mute and despairing. He felt he would rather be tied face to face with a dead

man, than live in the cold gaze of those hopeless eyes. In the morning he comforted himself with the thought that the old man's memory might fail him, and that he would himself be so changed by his prison dress and cropped hair, as to pass unrecognised.

When he first entered the prison-yard, he cast a nervous glance among his fellow-prisoners. The face he dreaded was not among them, and he went to work with a good will. Perhaps *he* whom he so dreaded to meet was dead! Who could tell?

But before the day was ended, he suddenly found himself face to face with a bent, spectre-like figure, or, as it appeared to him, a very wreck of the man he had first tempted, and then betrayed. He cowered and tried to shrink past him, but the old man peered into his face with a wild look of terror that was like the stare of a madman! Joel Craig struggled to get away, but the old man held him fast. Then a cry, or something more than a cry, like the shriek of a soul in pain, burst from the old man's lips—"O God! my son! my son!" He flung his arms round his neck, and fell senseless upon his breast; but the hands clung to him still with a close, unconscious clasp. The warders hurried to the spot, and set Joel Craig free, and conveyed the old man back to his cell.

About ten days after this undesired and dreaded meeting, Paul Wynter came down to Brooklands in deep mourning; but there was an elasticity in his step, a brightness in his eye, and a lightness in his heart he had never known before.

He mourned outwardly, as the world mourns; but he could not clothe his soul in sadness, and grieve for the old man who was gone. He had mourned as few men mourn for the sin and the shame. He would lay them both down now in the old man's grave. He felt like a new man, as though he had been born again. As he and Margaret walked together once more beneath the stately trees at Brooklands, and as he looked upon the sweet tender face by his side, and knew that he had won her fairly, and she would be his own, his very own, to love and to cherish until this world ended, and eternity began, his heart swelled with gratitude to God, who had at last taken away his cross, and

given him this crown of a sweet woman's love. A feeling of solemn joy stole over him as he said,—

“Margaret, love, I feel as though I had buried my old life, even as I have buried the old name, that was so stained and tainted. *You* could never have borne *that*, Margaret, never! We will begin a new life, with a new name, and we will begin it together.”



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—o—

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—○—

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—○—

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—○—

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—○—

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Author of "Milly's Hero."

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9

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—○—

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—○—

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—*Daily News.*

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By the Author of "Owen,"
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—○—

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10

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—○—

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12

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—O—

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"A very good story. The reader cannot but feel interested in the loves, the joys, and sorrows of 'The Slaves of the Ring.' It is no small praise to say that the present tale possesses in almost every respect the good qualities of the author's previous works."—*Observer*.

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Author of "La Beata," &c.

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